The GIRLS of CENTRAL HIGH IN CAMP

BY GERTRUDE W. MORRISON

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Marjorie Bedford

Xmas 1919.

LAURA AND CHET CARRIED ON A SILENT CONVERSATION FOR SOME TEN MINUTES.

Girls of Central High in Camp. *Frontispiece* (*Page* 121)

The Girls of Central High in Camp

OR

THE OLD PROFESSOR'S SECRET

BY

GERTRUDE W. MORRISON

AUTHOR OF THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH,
THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH ON LAKE LUNA,
ETC.

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THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH SERIES

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THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH IN CAMP
Or, The Old Professor's Secret

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THE GIRLS OF CENTRAL HIGH IN CAMP

CHAPTER I

"WHERE, OH, WHERE?"

FIELD DAY was past and gone and the senior class of Central High, Centerport's largest and most popular school, was thinking of little but white dresses, bouquets, and blue-ribboned diplomas.

The group of juniors, however, who had made the school's athletic record for the year in the Girls' Branch Athletic League, had other matters to discuss—and in their opinion they were matters of much greater moment.

"Boiled down," stated Bobby Hargrew, "to its last common divisor, it is 'Where, oh, where shall we spend our vacation?'"

They had decided some weeks before—Bobby herself, Laura Belding, Jess Morse, the Lockwood twins and Dr. Agnew's daughter, Nellie—that a portion at least of the long summer vaca-

tion should be spent in camp. The mooted question was, where?

"No seashore resort," Nellie said, with more decision than she usually displayed, for Nellie was of a timid and peaceful disposition.

"No," agreed Laura Belding. "We'll eschew the three S's—'sun, sand, and 'skeeter-bites.' That is the slogan of the seashore resort. Besides, it costs too much to get there."

"That's an important item to take into consideration, girls, if *I'm* to go," said Jess Morse.

"I thought you were a millionairess?" laughed Bobby. "Where are the royalties from your play?"

"Those won't begin till the producer puts the play on next season," returned Jess, who had been fortunate in writing a play for amateur production good enough to interest a professional theatrical manager.

"Well, we've got to have *you*, Jess," said Bobby (otherwise Clara) Hargrew. "For we're depending upon your mother to play chaperon for the crowd, wherever we go."

"Let's find a quiet spot, then," said Jess, eagerly. "Mother wants to write a book this summer and she says she would love to be somewhere where she doesn't need to play the society game, or dress——"

"Back to the Garden of Eden for hers!" chuckled Bobby. "Eve didn't have to dress—that is, not before *Fall*."

"Aren't you awful, Bobby?" cried one of the Lockwood twins—but *which* one it was who spoke could not have been sworn to by their most familiar friend. Dora and Dorothy looked just alike, dressed just alike, their voices were alike, and they usually acted in perfect harmony, too!

"Well," pursued Laura Belding, "if we are going to spend the first weeks of the summer vacation in camp, we must decide upon the spot at once. Are we all agreed that we shall *not* go to the salt water?"

"Oh, yes!" cried her particular chum, Jess, or Josephine, Morse.

"None of the troubles of the seaside boarder for ours," Bobby announced, hurriedly groping amid the rubbish in her skirt pocket and bringing forth a crumpled newspaper clipping. Bobby insisted upon having a pocket in almost every garment she wore (it was whispered that she wore pajamas at night for that reason) and no boy ever carried a more heterogeneous collection in his pockets than she did.

"See here! here's one seaside visitor's complaint," and she intoned in a singsong voice the following doggerel:

"'Why don't red-headed girls get tanned?
Why does a collar wilt?
Why is the sea so near the land?
Why were the billows built?
Why is the "crawl-stroke" hard to learn?
Why is the sea bass shy?
Why is the nose the first to burn?
Why *is* the stinging fly?

"'Why do mosquito nettings leak?
Why do all fishers lie?
Why does the grunter-fish always squeak?
Why do they feed us on clam-pie?
Why does the boardwalk hurt the feet?
Why is the seaweed green?
Why can't a bathing suit look neat?
Why won't straw hats stay clean?

"'Why——'"

"Stop it!" shrieked Jess, covering her ears. "How *dare* you read such preposterous stuff?"

"'Whys to the wise,' you know," giggled Bobby.

"I vote we refuse to allow Bobby to go camping with the crowd unless she positively refrains from quoting verse on any and every occasion," drawled Nellie.

"Hardhearted creature!" cried Dora Lockwood. "Poor Bobs couldn't live without *that* 'scape-gap."

"By the way, girls," Laura Belding asked, briskly, "are we going to let any other girls join this camping party—or is it to be just us six?"

"Who else wants to go?" demanded Bobby, quickly.

"Lil Pendleton——"

"Always that!" ejaculated Bobby, in disgust.

"Why, Bobby!" cried Dorothy. "I thought you and Lilly kissed and made up?"

"Oh, yes—we did," grunted the smaller girl. "That is, we kissed. Lil was already made up."

"Now Bobby!" admonished Laura.

"That's horrid of you, Bobby," Nellie declared. "You are incorrigible."

Yet they all had to laugh. Bobby Hargrew *was* just a cut-up!

"I'm worse than that long word you called me, Nell," said little Miss Hargrew. "But we're not going to have any such spoil-sport as Lil Pendleton along."

"But Chet and Lance say that Prettyman Sweet has begged so hard to go camping with *them*, that they're going to take him—just for the fun they will have at his expense, I s'pose," said Laura.

"That's why Lil wants to go camping," Dora said. "She's got such an awful crush on Pretty Sweet that she wants to do everything he does."

"That dude!" scoffed Bobby.

"He and Lil make a good pair," said Jess.

"Wait a minute!" cried Dorothy Lockwood. "Where are the boys going to camp this year, Laura?"

"On the shore of Lake Dunkirk, somewhere."

"Say, Mother Wit," cried Bobby, addressing by her universal nickname the leader of the crowd of Central High girls. "Wouldn't it be fun to camp near—That is, providing the boys are all nice."

"Well, beside Chet and Lance and Pretty Sweet, there'll be Short and Long, Reddy Butts and Arthur Hobbs, anyway. I don't know how many more," Laura said. "But you know that Chet and Lance wouldn't have any but nice fellows in their crowd."

"Barring Pretty," said Bobby, "they are all good chaps—so far. We wouldn't mind having them for neighbors.

"And why can't we?" she added, suddenly. "Why, girls! Father Tom has recently bought into the Rocky River Lumber Company and that company owns Acorn Island."

"Acorn Island? Great!" declared Jess.

"That's the big island in Lake Dunkirk, you know," explained Laura to the Lockwood twins, who looked puzzled.

"Acorn Island is just the finest kind of a place for a camp," said the enthusiastic Jess. "It's just like a wilderness."

"Right! The company isn't going to cut the timber on the island till next winter. Father Tom says so."

"I've been to picnics on Acorn Island," said Nellie Agnew. "It *is* a beautiful spot."

"Acorn Island it is, then," cried Bobby. "Hurrah! We'll spend our vacation there!"

She almost shouted this declaration. The girls had been lingering to talk in the high school yard and were now at the gate. Nellie suddenly tugged at Laura's sleeve and whispered:

"Look there! *what* do you suppose is the matter with Professor Dimp?"

Bobby spun around at the word, having heard the sibilant whisper. She likewise stared at the rusty-coated gentleman who had just passed the gate, having come from the main entrance of the Central High building.

"Gee!" exclaimed the slangy Bobby. "What's got Old Dimple now? What have *I* ever done to him—except massacre the Latin language?—and that's a 'dead one.' anyway!"

The Latin teacher—the bane of all careless and ill-prepared boys and girls of the Latin class—was a slightly built, stoop-shouldered man who never seemed to own a new coat, and was as forgetful as a person really could be, and be allowed to go about without a keeper.

He often passed the members of his class on the street without knowing them at all; the boys said you might as well bow to a post as to Old Dimple!

But here he had taken particular notice of Bobby Hargrew; indeed, he stopped to turn around and glare right at her—just as though she had said something particularly offensive to him as he passed the group.

"Goodness!" murmured Jess. "If you're not in trouble with Gee Gee, Bobs, you manage to get one of the other instructors down on you. What have you done to the professor?"

"Nothing, I declare!" said Bobby, plaintively.

"If you'd murdered his grandmother he couldn't look any harder at you," chuckled Dora Lockwood.

The professor suddenly saw that he had disturbed the party of schoolgirls. He actually flushed, and turned hurriedly to move away.

As he did so he pulled a big, blue-bordered handkerchief from the tail pocket of his frock-

coat. That pocket was notably a "catch-all" for anything the poor, absent-minded professor wished to save, or to which he took a fancy. Once Short and Long (otherwise a very short boy named Long) dropped a kitten into the professor's tail pocket and the gentleman did not discover it until he reached for his bandana to wipe his moist brow when he stood up to lecture his Latin class.

However, it was nothing like a kitten that followed the blue-bordered handkerchief out of the voluminous skirt-pocket. A crumpled clipping from a newspaper fell to the walk as Professor Dimp strode away.

Bobby Hargrew's quick eye noted the clipping first, and she darted to retrieve it. She came back more slowly, reading the printed slip.

"What is it, Bob?" asked Jess, idly.

"Why, Clara!" exclaimed Laura Belding, "aren't you going to give it back to him?"

"Look here, girls!" ejaculated the excited and thoughtless Bobby, looking up from the newspaper clipping. "What do you think of this? Old Dimple must be secretly interested in modern crime as well as in the murdered ancient languages. This is all about those forgeries in the Merchants and Miners Bank, of Albany. You know, they say a young fellow—almost a boy

—did them; and he can't be found and they don't know what he did with the money obtained by the circulating of the false paper."

"My! Our Aunt Dora lost some securities. She just wrote us about it," Dorothy Lockwood said, eagerly.

"And he wasn't much but a boy!" murmured Nellie. But Laura said, sharply: "Bobby! that's not nice. Run after Professor Dimp and give the clipping to him."

"Gee! you're so awfully particular," grumbled the harum-scarum. But she started after the shabby figure of the Latin teacher and caught up with him before Professor Dimp had reached the end of the next block—for Bobby Hargrew had taken the palm in the quarter mile dash at the Girls' Branch League Field Day and there were few girls at Central High who could compete with her as a sprinter.

When she returned to the group of her friends, still eagerly discussing the plans for their camping trip, her footsteps lagged. Laura noticed the curious expression on the smaller girl's face.

"What *has* happened you, Bobby?" she demanded.

"Why! I'm so surprised," gasped Bobby. "I must have done something *awful* to Old Dimple.

When he saw what it was I handed him, he grabbed it and just snarled at me:

"'Where did you get that, Miss Hargrew?'

"And when I told him, he looked as though he didn't believe me and had to search his pocket to make sure he *had* dropped it. And he looked at me so fiercely and suspiciously. Goodness! I don't know what I've done to him."

"He's odd, you know," suggested Mother Wit.

"That's all right," said Bobby, somewhat tartly; "but what the mischief he wants to bother himself about where we go camping——"

"What do you mean, Bobs?" demanded Jess, while the other girls all looked amazed.

"Why he said to me just now," answered the disturbed girl, "'you girls better keep away from Acorn Island. That's no place for you to go camping.' And then walked right off with his old clipping, and without giving me a chance to ask him what he meant," concluded Bobby Hargrew.

CHAPTER II

PLANS FOR THE SUMMER

Bobby Hargrew came to school the next morning with rather a sour face for her. "What's the matter, dear?" asked Nell Agnew, sympathetically.

"I wish I were a bird," grumbled Bobby.

"So you could soar into the circumambient ether and leave all mundane things below?" queried Jess Morse, with a chuckle.

"No," said Bobby, in disgust. "So I wouldn't have a toothache. I was up with one of my old grinders half the night."

"Have it pulled," suggested Laura.

"Say!" cried Bobby. "That's the easiest thing in the world to say and the hardest to do. And you know it, Mother Wit! You can have an old toothache that will make you feel like committing suicide; and when you get to the dentist shop you wish you *had* committed suicide before you got there," and jolly little Bobby began to grin again.

"Suicide is a serious matter," said Nellie, gravely.

"Surely, surely," the cut-up replied, dropping her voice to a gruesome pitch. "Listen!

"'Beside a sewer a man lay dead,
A dagger in his side;
The coroner's decision read:
"He died of suicide."

'Now if this man at home in bed,
Had in this manner died,
Then could the coroner have said:
"He died of homicide"?'

"Never joke about serious things, Nell."

"Hush, Bobby!" commanded Laura Belding. "Tell us, do, if your father has agreed to let us go camping on Acorn Island?"

"Of course," replied the younger girl. "And he says there is a cabin there that can be made tight for ten dollars. It's all right to camp under canvas; but if a big storm should come up he says we'd be glad of that cabin."

"Great!" announced Jess Morse.

"The cabin shall be your mother's particular shelter," said Laura. "Eh, girls?"

"If she is kind enough to go with us," said

Nellie, " she should have the very best of everything."

" She can have *my* share of the wood ants and red spiders," chuckled Bobby. " But it's all right, girls. Father Tom says we can have the island to ourselves. And believe me: this bunch of girls of Central High will sure have a good time!"

Which was a prophecy likely to be fulfilled, if the past adventures of these same girls were any criterion of the future.

For more than a year now the girls of Central High, together with those of the other two high schools of Centerport and the high schools of Lumberport and Keyport—all five—had been deeply interested in the Girls' Branch League athletics. In following the various games and exercises approved by their instructor, Mrs. Case, these six girls introduced above, had engaged in many and varied enterprises and adventures.

In " The Girls of Central High; Or, Rivals for All Honors," the first volume of this series, Laura Belding (" Mother Wit ") was enabled to interest one of the wealthiest men of Centerport in girls' athletics so that he gave a large sum toward the preparation of a handsome athletic field and gymnasium for Central High.

The second volume is entitled: " The Girls of Central High on Lake Luna," and the third is

"The Girls of Central High at Basket Ball"—the titles of which tell their own story.

"The Girls of Central High on the Stage," the fourth volume, tells of the writing and first production by her mates of Jess Morse's successful play, while the fifth of the series is entitled: "The Girls of Central High on Track and Field; Or, Champions of the School League."

Laura, Jess, Nellie, the Lockwood Twins and Bobby were girls of dissimilar characters (that is, if we count Dora and Dorothy as "one and indivisible" like the Union of the States). Laura's brother Chetwood, his chum, Lance Darby, Billy Long, and some of the other Central High boys were usually entangled in the girls' adventures—sufficiently to give spice to the incidents.

So, all considered, it was only reasonable that the girls should have eagerly agreed upon the site of their summer camp—Acorn Island. They knew that the boys would probably have their own camp on one shore or the other of the lake, and within sight of the island.

Chet, who seldom failed to walk home with Jess and carry her books—unless the gymnasium called the girls after the school session—and Lance, who filled like office of faithful squire to Laura, joined the girl chums on this afternoon.

"Got it all planned, have you?" Chet said. "I hear Acorn Island is going to be overrun with a gang of female Indians right after graduation."

"We have got to go up there to keep watch of you boys," laughed his sister. "But it's nice of Bobby's father to let us camp there."

"Pull—sheer pull," grumbled Lance. "We fellows tried our best to get permission to camp on the Island."

"Well," said Jess, demurely. "You can come to the island visiting. It will be perfectly proper. My mother says she will go to chaperon us, now that she knows there is a cabin there."

"And Bobby's father is going to send a couple of men up from Lumberport to make the cabin tight and fix things up a little for us. We'll pitch our tents on the knoll right by the cabin," Laura said, eagerly.

"Pretty spot," agreed Chet. "We'll probably have our camp in sight of it and the lake between the south shore and the island is only about two miles broad."

"Oh! we'll have a bully time," his chum agreed.

"Say!" Chet said, suddenly, addressing Lance Darby. "What was professor Dimp saying to you about camping? I heard a word or two. Something about going to the island?"

"Why! I forgot to tell you about that," re-

turned Lance, quickly, while the two girls cast enquiring glances at each other. "Old Dimple is certainly an odd stick."

"As odd as Dick's hat-band," agreed Chet.

"And no-end forgetful. He's been worse than ever lately. There certainly is something worrying him."

"You boys," laughed Jess.

"Something worse than boys," Lance returned. "It's a shame how forgetful he is. Say! did you hear what he did at Mr. Sharp's the other night?"

"No," said the others, in chorus.

Lance began to chuckle. Mr. Franklin Sharp was the principal of Central High, and was very much admired by all the pupils; while Professor Dimp, because of his harshness and his queer ways, was the butt of more than a few jokes.

"It was night before last when it rained so hard," resumed Lance. "He was there going over Latin exercises or something, with the Doctor. Mrs. Sharp asked him to stay all night, when it came on so hard to rain, and the old Prof thanked her and said he would.

"Mr. Sharp went into his office to do something or other and left Old Dimple in the library for a while. The family lost track of him then. Right in the middle of the hardest downpour, about

eleven o'clock, the front door bell rang, and Mrs. Sharp went to the door.

"There was Old Dimple, under a dripping umbrella, his pants wet to the knees, and his pajamas and toothbrush under his arm——"

"Oh, Lance!" ejaculated Laura. "That is too much to believe."

"Fact. He'd gone home for his nightclothes. I got it from our hired girl and she got it from Mrs. Sharp's maid. So, there you have it!"

"But you didn't tell us what the old Prof was saying to you about camping," reminded Chet, when the general laugh was over.

"Why! that's so. And it was odd, too, that he should take any interest in what we fellows were going to do this summer."

"What about it?" Jess asked.

"He wanted to know if we were going to pitch our camp, too, on Acorn Island? He seemed to know you girls were going there."

"How odd!" murmured Laura and Jess, together. And the latter added: "Bobby said he seemed mad when he found out *we* were going to Acorn Island."

"Well, drawled Lance, "he seemed sort of relieved when I told him we fellows were going to camp on the mainland."

"Funny he should trouble his head about us out of school hours at all," Chet said again.

His sister made no further comment upon the professor's queer actions. Nevertheless her curiosity was aroused regarding the old instructor's sudden interest in anything beside Latin exercises and Greek roots.

CHAPTER III

VISITORS' DAY

THE afternoon preceding the closing exercises of Central High was Visitors' Day at the girls' gymnasium. This was an entirely different affair from the recent Field Day when Laura Belding and her particular friends had so well distinguished themselves.

On *that* occasion the general public had been invited. Visitors' Day might better have been called "Mothers' Day." Mrs. Case personally invited all those mothers who had shown little interest, or positive objection, to their daughters' athletic activities.

For to the Centerport ladies the fact that their daughters were being trained "like prize-ring fighters," as one good but misled mother had said in a letter to the newspaper, was not only a novel course but was considered of doubtful value.

"And you must come, Mother," begged Laura, when Mrs. Belding seemed inclined to make excuses. Mrs. Belding was one of the mothers who

could not approve of her daughter's interest in athletics.

"Really, Laura, I am not sure that I should enjoy myself seeing you crawl about those ladders like a spider—or climbing ropes like a sailor—or turning on a trapeze like a monkey—or otherwise making yourself ridiculous."

"Oh, Mother!" half-laughed Laura. Yet she was a little hurt, too.

"Aw, Mother, don't side-step your plain duty," said Chet, his eyes twinkling.

"Chetwood! You know very well that I do not approve of many of these modern dances. I certainly do not 'sidestep'"——

"That isn't a dance, Mother," giggled Laura.

Her husband chuckled at the other end of the table. "My dear," he said, suavely, "you should keep up with the times——"

"No, thank you. I have no desire to. Keeping up with the times, as you call it, has made my son speak a language entirely unintelligible to *my* ear, and has made my daughter an exponent of muscular exercises of which I cannot approve."

"Pshaw!" said her husband, easily. "Basket-ball, and running, and rowing, and the exercise she gets at that gymnasium, aren't going to hurt Mother Wit."

"There you go!" exclaimed his wife. "You

have begun to apply to Laura an appellation which she has gained since all this disturbance over athletics among the girls, has arisen.

"I can no more than expect," went on Mrs. Belding, seriously, "that, dissatisfied with basketball and the like, the girls will become baseball and football—what do you call them, Chetwood? Fans?"

"Quite right, mother," Laura hastened to answer instead of her brother. "And all we girls of Central High are fans already when it comes to baseball and football. I'd like to belong to a baseball team, myself, for one——"

"Laura!" gasped her mother, while her father and Chet burst out laughing.

"It's the finest game in the world," declared Laura, stoutly.

"Hear! hear!" from Chet.

"I've been to see the games a lot with father Saturday afternoons," began Laura, when her mother interposed:

"Indeed? *That* is why you are so eager always to spend your forenoons with your father on Saturday?"

"Oh, Mother! I really *do* help father in the jewelry-store—don't I, Dad?"

"Couldn't get along without you, daughter," said Mr. Belding, stoutly.

"And he always takes me for a nice bite in a restaurant," pursued the girl, "and then if there's a game, we go to see it."

"Runaways!" said Mrs. Belding, shaking an admonishing finger at them. "So you encourage her in these escapades, do you, Mr. Belding?"

"Quite so, Mother," he returned. "You're behind the times. Girls are different nowadays —in open practise, at least—from what they were in our day. Of course, I remember when I first saw you——"

"That will do!" exclaimed Mrs. Belding, flushing very prettily, while the children laughed. "We will not rake up old stories, if you please."

Any reference to the occasion at which her husband hinted, usually brought his wife "to time," as Chet slangily expressed it. She agreed to be present at the girls' gymnasium on that last day when the girls used the paraphernalia as they pleased, with Mrs. Case standing by to direct, or admonish, or advise.

Mrs. Belding found in the gallery overlooking the big gymnasium floor many of her neighbors, church friends, or fellow club-members.

"I've been trying to get here for months," one stout lady confided to the Market Street jeweler's wife; "but it does seem to me I never have a minute to spare. But Lluella says that I *must*

come now, for the term is ending. That's Lluella over yonder jumping on that mat. Isn't she quick on her feet?"

"Grace is such a reckless child," complained the lady on Mrs. Belding's other side. "She's her father all over again—and he's got the quickest temper of any man I ever saw. Gets over it right away, you know; but it's a trial to have a man get mad because the coffee's muddy of a morning."

"Oh, I know all about *that*," sighed the fleshy lady, windily.

"I don't suppose there's really any danger of the children getting hurt here, Mrs. Belding?" proceeded the thin mother.

"I believe not. Laura says there is no danger——"

"Oh, your Laura is a regular athlete!" interrupted the fat woman. "My Lluella says she is just *wonderful*."

"So does my Grace," declared the thin lady on the other side. "She says there's nobody like 'Mother Wit,' as she calls Laura."

"I think there is no danger," murmured Mrs. Belding, not sure whether she was glad or sorry that her daughter was so popular.

"Oh, Mrs. Belding! are *you* here?" broke in rather a shrill voice from the rear. "I told Lily

I would come today; but really, I hardly knew whether it was the thing to approve of this gymnasium business——"

Mrs. Pendleton's voice trailed off as it usually did before she completed a sentence. She was a small, extremely vivacious, black-eyed woman, much overdressed, and carrying a lorgnette with which she eyed the crowd of girlish figures on the floor below.

"Of course," she murmured to Mrs. Belding, "if *you* approve——"

"Where is Grace now?" cried the thin lady, suddenly. "Mercy! See where she has climbed to. Do you suppose they can get her without a ladder?"

Grace, a thin, wiry child of the wriggling type, had successfully clambered up the rope almost to the beam overhead and was now surveying the gallery with lofty compassion, which included a lively appreciation of her mother's uneasiness.

"Oh, Grace!" shrilled the thin woman. "Get down this instant! Or do you want me to bring you a ladder?"

An appreciative giggle arose from some of the girls below. Grace turned rather red around her ears, and began to descend. It was one thing to make her mother marvel; she did not want her "act" to be turned to ridicule.

"They look real pretty—now don't they?" admitted Mrs. Pendleton, loftily, after surveying the gymnasium for some time through her lorgnette. "Lily's dress cost us a deal of trouble. But she looks well in it. She's well developed for her age and—thank goodness!—she has a *chic* way with her.

"I thought we never would get the suit to fit her. And she changed her shoes three times," added the society matron. "Finally I told her if she was going to have nervous prostration getting ready to take physical culture, she'd better wait and take it when she was convalescent."

"I hope Lluella will be careful of her hands," said the fleshy lady on Mrs. Belding's right. "She's always bruising or cutting her fingers. Just like her aunt. Her aunt always had to wear gloves doing her housework."

"There! they are going to march," cried the thin lady, as Mrs. Case blew her whistle and the girl on the rope slid the last few feet to the floor. "Grace is down, thank goodness!

"Her music teacher says Grace's ear is a regular gift—she keeps such good time."

"I'm sure no sensible parent would ever have *bought* those ears," whispered Mrs. Pendleton to Mrs. Belding. "They must have been a gift,"

for those organs on the agile Grace were painfully prominent.

"But she had *such* a pretty smile when she looked up at her mother just now," whispered the kind-hearted Mrs. Belding.

"That reminds me," said the society matron—though why it should have reminded her nobody knows! "That reminds me, my Lily is crazy to go camping—positively crazy!"

"I know," sighed Mrs. Belding. "Laura is determined, too. And her father approves and has overruled all *my* objections."

"Oh, it's not *that* with me at all," said Mrs. Pendleton, briskly. "I'm glad enough to have the child go. She's too much advanced for her age, anyway. If she spends this summer at Newport, and Bar Harbor, and one or two other places where I positively *must* appear, I'll never be able to get her back into school this fall.

"It ages a mother so to have a growing daughter—and one that is so forward as Lily," said this selfish lady, fretfully. "Lily thinks she is grown up now. No. I approve of her going with a lot of little girls into camp. And she wants to go with your Laura's crowd, Mrs. Belding."

"I'm sure—Laura would be pleased," said Mrs Belding, sweetly, without an idea that she was laying up trouble in store for Mother Wit.

"Oh, then, I can leave it with you, dear Mrs. Belding?" cried Mrs. Pendleton, with uncanny eagerness. "You will arrange it?"

"Why—er—I presume Laura and her friends would have no objection to another of their schoolmates joining them. I understand Mrs. Morse will chaperon them——"

"And quite a proper person for that office, too," agreed Mrs. Pendleton. "I presume they will take along a maid."

"Oh! I do not know," said Mrs. Belding, beginning to feel somewhat worried now. "I imagine the girls expect to do for themselves ——"

"Oh! I will send a maid with Lily. At least, I will pay the wages of one who will do for all the girls—in a way."

She bustled away to find Lily after the march. Mrs. Belding waited for her daughter in more or less trepidation. It had suddenly crossed her mind that Lily Pendleton was seldom at her house with the friends that Mother Wit gathered about her.

CHAPTER IV

"LONESOME LIZ"

"OH, galloping grasshoppers!" gasped Bobby Hargrew, clinging tight to Laura and Nellie Agnew in the dressing-room. "Do you hear what she says?"

"What language, Bob!" said Nellie, in horror. "How *can* you?"

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Laura, with an admonishing look.

"That Lil Pendleton. The gall of her!"

"Stop, Bob!" commanded Laura. "You talk like a street urchin."

"I don't care if I talk like a sea urchin," complained the smaller girl. "She says she's going with us."

"Where?" asked Nell.

"Camping."

"Who?" exclaimed Laura, promptly.

"That Pendleton girl. Says her mother just told her. *Your* mother said so, Laura Belding. So there!"

"Why—why——"

"I don't want to complain of your mother, Laura," said the grocer's daughter, "but it seems too bad we can't pick and choose whom we'll have go camping in our crowd."

"Mother doesn't understand! I am sure she never meant to *make* us take Lil if we didn't want her."

"And surely we *don't*," declared the doctor's daughter, with more emphasis than she usually used in commenting upon any subject.

"Let's put the rollers under her and let her zip," exclaimed the slangy Bobby.

"If Gee Gee should hear you," laughed Laura, referring to one of the very strict lady teachers of Central High, Miss Grace Gee Carrington.

"She's too busy with Margit Salgo—Beg pardon!" exclaimed Bobby. "Margaret Carrington, as she will in future be known. Gee Gee has scarcely called me down this week."

"Now, if it was Margit who wanted to go," sighed Nell Agnew, speaking of the half-Gypsy girl who had just come under the care of Miss Carrington.

"Or Eve Sitz," added Bobby. "But Eve says she gets out-of-door work enough on the farm in the summer. Camping out is no fun for her."

"I don't know what to say about Lily," began

Laura. "I cannot understand mother promising such a thing. If anybody should decide, it should be Jess' mother. *She* is going with us."

"Oh! there's another thing," interrupted the fly-away Bobby. "If Lil goes, she's going to take along a lady's maid."

"*What?*" gasped the other girls.

"Mrs. Pendleton is going to pay the wages of a girl to go with us and do the camp work," announced Bobby, and now she spoke with some enthusiasm.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Laura.

"Not so bad," sighed Nellie, who really did *not* like hard work and had dreaded that division of labor which she knew must fall to her if they went camping without "help."

"Having a girl along to cook and do up the beds and wash dishes and the like wouldn't be so bad," announced Bobby, growing braver as Nell seemed to encourage the idea.

"Well! Miss Hargrew!" accused Laura. "I believe you have gone over to the enemy. *You* really want Lil to go with us to Acorn Island."

"No. But I'd be glad to have her mother pay the wages of somebody to do most of the hard work," grinned Bobby.

There was a regular "buzz society," as Bobby called it, after the girls were dressed. The origi-

nal six who had planned to go camping on Acorn Island *did* hum like a colony of bees when they all learned that Lily Pendleton was likely to be foisted upon them.

"It's a shame!" exclaimed Jess, angrily. "She knows well enough we don't want her."

"Well," murmured one of the Lockwood twins. "She asked us and we said the invitation would have to come through Laura."

"Cowards!" exclaimed Mother Wit, dramatically. "That's why she got her mother to go to *mine*. And I am real angry with mother——"

"Oh, Laura! we wouldn't offend your mother for anything," said Nell, hastily.

"Or put her in an uncomfortable position," Bobby added. "She's been too nice to us all."

"And, of course, we have to stand Lil in the school and gymnasium. She won't kill us; she's only silly," went on Nell.

"I believe you're all more or less willing to have Lil go," declared Laura, in wonder.

"We–ell," drawled Bobby. "There's the chance of having somebody to do the camp work for us——"

"Not Lil!" shrieked Jess. "She never lifts her hand at home."

"No," said Nell. "But Mrs. Pendleton will pay a maid's wages."

"Ah—ha!" ejaculated Jess Morse. "I smell a mice, as the Dutchman says. We are to be bribed."

And bribed they were. At least, none of them wished to put Laura's mother to any trouble. So they agreed to let Lily Pendleton go camping with them. Mrs. Pendleton left it to the girls to find anyone they wanted to help about the camp, and promised to pay good wages.

"I know just whom we can get," Bobby said, eagerly, that evening when the girls—and some of the boys—were assembled as usual on the Belding front porch.

"Who's that?"

"That Bean girl," said the groceryman's daughter.

"Who's she? Miss Boston Bean?" chuckled Chet.

"Lizzie Bean! I know who she is," exclaimed Laura.

"She's the girl who's been helping the Longs since Alice came back to school. Now Alice will keep house for her father and the other children again, and Lizzie will be out of a job," explained Bobby.

"Whew! 'Lonesome Liz?'" ejaculated Lance Darby. "Short and Long calls her that. Says she's about half cracked——"

"I guess she isn't cracked enough to hurt," said Dora Lockwood, quickly. "Is she, Dorothy?"

"Of course not," agreed her twin. "And she keeps the house beautifully clean, and looks after Tommy fine."

"Let me tell you Master Tommy Long is some kid to look after," chuckled Chet.

"And that's no dream," agreed his chum, Lance.

Bobby began to laugh, too. "Did you hear his latest?" she demanded of the crowd."

"Who's latest," asked Jess.

"Tommy Long—the infant terrible?"

"Let's hear it, Bobs," said Jess. "If he can say anything worse than *you* can——"

"But this break on Master Tommy's part was entirely unintentional. Alice was telling me about it. She sends him to Sunday School and he has to memorize the Golden Text and repeat it to her when he comes home.

"The other Sunday he had been skylarking in Sunday School, it was evident, for when she asked him to tell her the text, he shot this one at her: 'Don't worry. You'll get the blanket.'"

"*What?*" gasped Laura.

"That's a teaser," said Lance. "What did the kid mean?"

"That's what troubled Alice," chuckled Bobby.

"She couldn't get it at all; but Tommy stuck to it that he had given her the text straight. So she looked it up herself and what do you suppose Tommy had twisted into 'Don't worry. You'll get the blanket?'"

"Give it up," said Jess. "Let's have it."

"Why, the text was," said Bobby, more seriously, "'Fear not; the Comforter shall come unto you.'"

"That kid is a terror," said Chet, when the laugh had subsided. "And so's Short and Long. I believe he agreed to let Pretty Sweet go along with us to Lake Dunkirk just because he likes to play jokes on Purt."

"Dear me!" sighed Bobby, with unction. "With Pretty in your camp and Lil in ours, the sun of no day should go down upon us without seeing *some* fun."

"And if you have 'Lonesome Liz' along," chuckled Lance, "you girls certainly won't forget how to laugh."

It was agreed that Laura and Jess should see Lizzie Bean the next morning and engage her for the position—if she would accept. They started early, for although they were only juniors and would have another year to attend Central High before graduation, this last day of school would be a busy one for them as well as for the graduating class.

Billy and Alice Long, who were their schoolmates, lived in a much poorer quarter of the town; it was down toward the wharves, and not far from the Central High's boathouses.

The street was a typical water-side street, with small, gaily painted cottages, or cottages without any paint at all save that put on lavishly by the ancient decorating firm of Wind & Weather. Each dwelling had its own tiny fenced yard, with a garden behind. The Longs' was neatly kept both front and rear, and the house itself showed no neglect by the tenants.

Mr. Long was a hard working man, and although the children were motherless, Alice, the oldest, kept the home neat and cheerful for her brothers and sisters. All the children were old enough to go to school save Tommy; and he had been to kindergarten occasionally this last term and would go to school regularly in the fall.

Laura and Jess, hurrying on their errand, came in sight of the Long cottage abruptly, and of a wobegone little figure on the front step.

"Why, it's Tommy!" exclaimed Laura Belding. "Whatever is the the matter, Tommy?" for the little fellow was crying softly.

He was a most cherubic looking child, with a pink and white face, yellow curls that swept the clean collar of his shirt-waist, and a plump, "huggable" little body.

"Yes, what *is* the matter, dear?" begged Jess Morse.

"H–he's gone an' cut off th–the tails of the pu–puppies," sobbed Master Tommy, his breast heaving.

"Who has?" demanded Laura.

"He. That man what co–comed here," choked the little fellow.

"What a pity! I'm awfully sorry," Laura pursued, soothingly. "The po r little puppies."

"Ye–yes. Pa s–said *I* should chop 'em off myself!" concluded Master Tommy in a burst of anger.

"My goodness me!" gasped Jess, horror-stricken. "Will you hear that boy talk? He's a perfect little savage."

"No, he isn't," said Mother Wit, shaking her head. "He's only a boy—that's all. You never had a brother, Jess."

"I know well enough Chet was never like *that*," declared Josephine, confidently.

They went in by the front gate and walked around the house, leaving the disappointed youngster wiping his eyes. They expected to find Lizzie Bean at the back.

In that they were not mistaken. At the well-curb was a lank, bony girl, who might have been Laura's age, or perhaps a couple of years older.

She was dreadfully thin. As she hauled on the chain which brought the brimming bucket to the top of the well, she betrayed more red elbow and more white stockinged ankle-bone than any *one* person should display.

"My goodness, she's thin!" whispered Jess.

"We are not looking for a Hebe to help us at the camp," Laura returned in the same low tone.

Lizzie Bean turned to see who was approaching. Her face was as thin as the rest of her figure. Prominent cheek bones, a sharp, long nose, and a pointed chin do not make a beautiful countenance, to say the least.

Besides, the expression of her face was lachrymose in the extreme. It did seem, as Jess afterward said, that Lizzie must have lost all her relatives and friends very recently, and was mourning for them all!

"Goodness me!" she whispered to Laura. "No wonder they call her 'Lonesome Liz.' She's so sad looking she's positively funny."

CHAPTER V

THE START

"WHAT do you girls want?" drawled the lean girl, resting her red elbows on the well-shelf and looking down at Laura and Jess Morse.

She did not speak unpleasantly; but she was very abrupt. Laura saw that Lizzie Bean's flat, shallow appearing eyes were of a greenish gray color—eyes in which a twinkle could not possibly lurk.

"We understand that you are not going to help Alice much longer," Laura said, pleasantly. "So we have come to see if you would like another position for a few weeks?"

"What d'ye mean—a *job?*" proposed Liz-Bean, bluntly.

"Ye–yes," said Laura, rather taken aback.

"What doin'?"

"Why, we girls are going camping. There are seven of us—and Mrs. Morse. Mrs. Morse is the mother of my friend, here, Josephine Morse——"

"Please ter meet yer," interposed Liz, bobbing a little courtesy at the much amused Jess.

Laura went on steadily, and without smiling too broadly at Liz:

"There are seven of us girls and Mrs. Morse. We shall live very simply—in tents and in a cabin, on Acorn Isand."

"Eight in fam'bly, eh?" put in the thin girl. "Eight is a bigger contract than I got here."

"Oh! in camping out we don't expect anything fancy," Laura hastened to say. "We want somebody to make beds, and wash dishes, and clean up generally. Of course, the cooking will not *all* fall on your shoulders——"

"I sh'd hope not," said Liz, briskly. "Not if it was as solid as some folkses' biscuits. One woman I worked for once made her soda-riz biscuits so solid that if a panful had fell on yer shoulders 'twould ha' broke yer back."

Jess *had* to explode at that, but the odd girl did not even smile. She only stared at the giggling Jess and asked:

"Ain't ye well?"

"Oh, yes!" gasped Jess.

"Well, I didn't know," drawled Liz. "My a'nt what brought me up useter keep a bottle of giggle medicine for us gals. An' it was nasty tastin' stuff, too. She made us take a gre't

spoonful if we laffed at table, or after we gotter bed nights. There was jalap inter it, I b'lieve. I guess I could make ye some."

Jess stopped laughing in a hurry. Laura tried to ignore her chum's indignant look; but it was quite plain that Lizzie Bean "had all her wits about her," as the saying is.

"Then you can cook?" Laura observed.

"Well, I can boil water without burnin' it," declared the odd girl. "But I ain't no Woodruff-Wisteria chef." Afterward the chums figured it out that Liz meant "Waldorf-Astoria."

"Do you think you would like to go with us?" Laura asked.

"I dunno yet. Where is it?"

Laura explained more fully about the camping site, how they were to get there, and other particulars of the project.

"It listens good," Liz said, reflectively. "Though I ain't never cooked nothin' but soft-soap over a campfire."

"Oh! there will be a portable stove," Laura said.

"When ye goin'?" asked the girl.

"Day after to-morrow."

"What'll ye pay?" was the next bluntly put question.

Laura told her the weekly wage Mrs. Pendleton had guaranteed. Although Lizzie Bean's face was well nigh expressionless at all times, the girls saw at once that something was wrong.

"I dunno," said Liz, slowly. "I have worked mighty cheap in my life—and I ain't got no job when I leave here—an' I gotter eat. But that *does* seem a *naw*-ful little wages."

"Why! I think that is real liberal," declared Jess, with some warmth.

Liz eyed her again coldly. "You must ha' worked awful cheap in your life," she said.

"You know," Laura explained, quietly, laying an admonitory hand upon her chum's arm, "You know, that is what you will receive each week."

"What's *that*?" demanded Liz, with a jump. "Say that again, will ye?"

"We will pay you that sum weekly," repeated Laura.

"Say—say it by the month!" gasped the lean girl, her eyes showing more surprise than Laura had thought them capable of betraying.

Laura did as she was requested. A slow, faint grin dawned on Liz Bean's narrow countenance.

"I been useter gittin' paid by the month—and sometimes not *then*. Some ladies has paid me so

little for helpin' them that I wisht they'd paid me only every *three* months, so's 'twould sound bigger!

"I gotter take ye up before somebody pinches me."

"Pinches you? What do you mean?" asked Jess, doubtfully.

"I don't want to wake up," declared Liz. "I never got so much money since I was turned adrift when my a'nt died. Don't *you* wake up, neither, and forgit to pay me!"

"I promise not to do that," laughed Laura. "Then you'll come with us?"

"If I don't break an arm," declared Lizzie Bean, with emphasis.

They told her how to meet them at the dock, and the hour they expected to start. "And bring your oldest clothes," warned Jess.

"What's that?" demanded Liz.

"We just about live in old clothes—or in a bathing suit—in camp," explained Laura.

"Bless your heart!" exclaimed Liz. "I ain't never had nothin' but old clo'es. Been wearin' hand-me-downs ever since I can remember."

"My goodness gracious!" said Jess, and she and Laura hurried off for school. "Did you ever see such an uncouth creature? I don't wonder Billy Long says she's cracked."

"I don't know about her being cracked, as you call it," laughed Laura. "Just because she's queer is no proof that she is an imbecile. You know the old parody on 'Lives of Great Men All Remind Us,' don't you?" and she went on to quote:

"'Lives of imbeciles remind us
It may some day come to pass,
We shall see one staring at us
From our trusty looking-glass!'"

"Shucks!" responded Jess. "You'll get to be as bad as Bobby Hargrew with those old wheezes. But, did you *ever* see such a girl before?"

"No," admitted Laura. "I honestly never did. But I am quite sure she is in the possession of all her senses——"

"She may be; but I bet her senses are not like other folks'," chuckled Jess.

"She surely won't *bite,* Jess," responded Laura, smiling.

"Hope not! 'Boil water without burning it!' What do you know about *that?*"

"I think it's funny," said Laura.

"Well! I only hope we get something to eat in camp," murmured Jess.

"We can't expect her to do all the cooking," Laura said. "And I shall tell the girls so."

"Goodness! I don't know whether I want to go camping with this bunch, after all," said Jess. "What some of them will do to the victuals they have to cook will be a shame!"

However, the prospect of indifferent cookery made none of the girls of Central High less enthusiastic in the matter of the preparations for camping out on Acorn Island, in the middle of Lake Dunkirk.

They were all as busy as bees the next day, packing their bags and flying about from house to house, asking each other: "What you going to take?"

"Goodness me!" cried Laura, at last; "it isn't what do we *want*, but how little can we get along with! Discard everything possible, girls —do!"

Bobby Hargrew declared Lil Pendleton had started to pack a Saratoga trunk, and that she had been obliged to point out to Lil that neither of the motorboats was large enough to ship such a piece of baggage.

Their gymnasium suits would be just the thing in camp. And of course they all had bathing suits. Otherwise most of the girls got their apparel down to what Jess Morse called "an insignificant minority."

"If the King of India, or the Duke and

Duchess of Doosenberry, comes calling at our camp, we shall have to put up a scarlet fever sign and all go to bed," said Bobby "We'll have nothing to receive them in."

"But not Purt Sweet," chuckled Billy Long. "Purt's packed a dinner jacket and a pair of spats. How much other fancy raiment he proposes to spring on us the deponent knoweth not. He'll be just a scream in the woods."

"He asked me if there were many dangerous characters lurking in the woods around Lake Dunkirk," chuckled Lance. "Somebody has been stringing him about outlaws."

"Short and Long looks guilty," said Chet, suspiciously. "What you been stuffin' Purt with, Billy?"

Billy Long, who straddled the piazza rail, swinging his feet, showed his teeth in a broad smile. "You read about that Halliday fellow, didn't you?" he asked.

"Oh! the chap they say stole the money from that Albany bank?" responded Lance.

"It was securities he stole—and forged people's names to them so as to get money," said Laura. "The Lockwood girls' Aunt Dora lost some money by him."

"That is—if he did it," said Chet, doubtfully.

"Well, the newspapers say so," Jess observed.

"What if they do?" demanded Billy, belligerently. "They all said *I* helped burglarize that department store last summer—didn't they? And I never did it at all."

"No. It was another monkey," chuckled Lance.

The others laughed, for Billy Long had gotten them into serious trouble on the occasion mentioned, and it was long enough in the past now to seem amusing. But Chet added:

"It's a wonder to me that Norman Halliday had a chance to get hold of all those securities and forge people's names to them. And he knew just which papers to take. Looks fishy."

"Well, he ran away, anyhow," Lance said.

"So did Billy," Bobby said. "And for the same reason, perhaps. He was scared."

"My father says," Chet pursued, "he has his doubts about Halliday's guilt. He believes he is a catspaw for somebody else."

"Anyhow," said Billy, "the papers say he's gone into the Big Woods south of Lake Dunkirk. And Purt wants to carry a gun to defend himself from outlaws."

"If he does," Chet said, seriously, "I'll see that there are no cartridges in the gun. Huh! I wouldn't trust Purt Sweet with a pop-gun."

Bobby, meanwhile, was saying to Laura: "I

wonder why Old Dimple was interested enough in that Albany bank robbery to carry around that clipping out of the paper?"

"Maybe he lost money, too," Laura suggested.

"What's that about the old Prof?" put in Chet. "Do you know he's gone out of town already?"

"No!" was the chorus in reply.

"Fact. I saw him with his suitcase this forenoon. He took the boat to Lumberport."

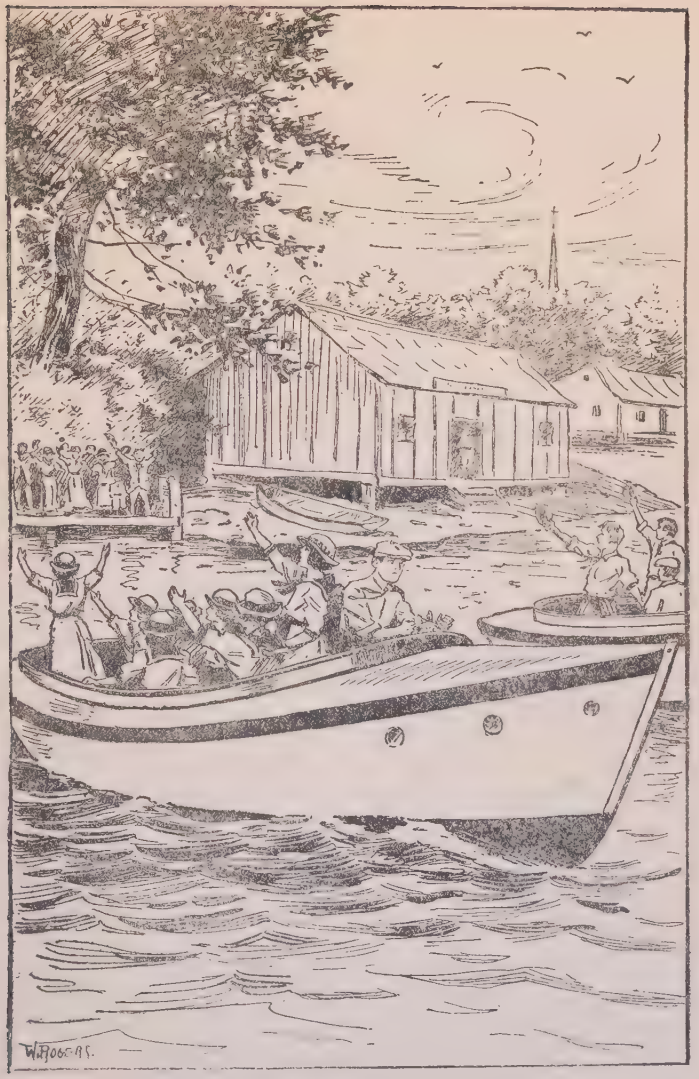
"Well, as we shall all start in that same direction to-morrow morning, bright and early——"

"Not all of us bright, but presumably early," put in Bobby, sotto voce.

"Anyway, it's time we were in bed," finished Mother Wit. "Off with you all!"

Whether Laura's advice had a good effect, or not, nobody was really late at the rendezvous the next morning. Prettyman Sweet's motorboat *Duchess,* a very nice craft, and the larger powerboat belonging to Chet Belding and Lance Darby, named *Bonnie Lass,* were manned by the boys before the girls appeared.

These two boats were large enough to transport both parties of campers, and would likewise tow the flotilla of canoes. The *Duchess* tailed behind it three double canoes belonging to



A PARTY OF PARENTS AND FRIENDS CAME TO SEE THE CAMPERS START.

the girls and the *Bonnie Lass* towed five belonging to their boy friends.

It was a fine day and the lake was as blue as the sky—and almost as smooth to look upon. A party of parents and friends came to see the campers start. The girls and Mrs. Morse went aboard the *Bonnie Lass.* Lizzie Bean, with a bulging old-fashioned carpet-bag, appeared in season and joined the girls.

In the bustle of departure not many noticed the odd looking maid. The girls and boys were too busy shouting goodbyes to those ashore, and the crowd ashore was too busy shouting good wishes, or last instructions, to the campers.

Mrs. Pendleton had been driven down to the wharf, early as the hour was, to see her daughter off.

"And be sure to wear your rubbers if it rains, Lily!" the lady shrieked after the departing *Bonnie Lass.*

"Gee!" whispered Bobby, to Jess. "I s'pose somebody'll have to hold an umbrella over her, too, if it starts to shower."

CHAPTER VI

PRETTYMAN SWEET MAKES A FRIEND

Lake Luna was a beautiful body of water, all of twenty miles long and half as broad, with Centerport on its southern shore and Lumberport and Keyport situated at either end.

The first named stood at the mouth of Rocky River which fed the great lake, while Keyport was at the head of Rolling River through which Lake Luna discharged its waters.

Centerport was a thriving and rich city of some 150,000 inhabitants, while the other two towns—although much smaller—were likewise thriving business communities. There was considerable traffic on Lake Luna, between the cities named, and up and down the rivers.

Cavern Island was a beautiful resort in the middle of Lake Luna; but man's hand was shown in its landscape gardening and in the pretty buildings and the park at one end.

Acorn Island, in Lake Dunkirk (thirty miles

above Lumberport, and connected with Lake Luna by Rocky River) was a very different place. It was heavily timbered and had been held by a private estate for years. Therefore the trees and rubbish had been allowed to grow, and one end of the island, as the girls of Central High knew, was almost a jungle.

But at the eastern end—that nearest the head of Rocky River—was a pleasant grove on a high knoll, where the old cabin stood. There they proposed to camp.

Indeed, Mr. Tom Hargrew, Bobby's father, had been kind enough to send the girls' tents up to the island with the men he had directed to repair the cabin, and the party expected to find the camp pitched, and everything ready for them when they arrived at Acorn Island.

This would scarcely be before dark, for there was some current to Rocky River, although its channel was deep and there were no bridges or other barriers which the powerboats and their tows could not easily pass.

The boys expected to have to rough it at the site of *their* camp for the first night, and they had come prepared for all emergencies of wind and weather.

All, did we say? All but one!

In the confusion of getting under way the

details of Prettyman Sweet's outing suit, and his general get-up for camping in the wilds, was scarcely noticed. Once the boats were steering up the lake toward Lumberport, a sudden shriek from Billy Long drew the attention of the girls and Mrs. Morse to the object to which he pointed.

"It's not! it's not! my eyes deceive me!" panted Short and Long, who was the third member of the crew of boys aboard the *Bonnie Lass*, Chet and Lance being the other two.

Short and Long was pointing to the other powerboat that was drawing in beside the *Bonnie Lass*, Pretty himself was at the wheel of the *Duchess* for he had learned to manage her.

"What *is* the matter with you, Billy?" Chet demanded.

"What *is* it I see?" begged the younger boy, wringing his hands and glaring across the short strip of water between the powerboats. "I know there ain't no sech animile, as the farmer said when he first saw the giraffe at the circus."

"What's eating you, Billy?" asked Lance, who was giving his attention to the steering of the *Bonnie Lass*. "Don't frighten the girls and Mrs. Morse to death."

"It's just some joke of Billy's," began Jess, when the very short boy broke in with:

"If *that's* a joke, may I never see another!

It is a phantom! It's a nightmare! It's something that comes to you in a bad dream."

"*What?*" demanded Chet, suddenly shaking Short and Long by the collar.

"Don't, Chetwood," begged Billy. "I'm not strong. I'm sea-sick. That thing yonder has queered me——"

"What thing?" asked Laura. "We don't see the joke, Billy."

"There you go again—calling a serious thing like that a joke," cried the small boy. "Look at it—at the wheel of the *Duchess*! How ever did it crawl aboard? I bet a cent it's been living in the bottom of the lake for years and years, and has come up to the light of day for the first time now."

"You ridiculous thing!" snapped Lily Pendleton. "Do you mean Prettyman Sweet?"

"My goodness gracious Agnes!" gasped Billy. "That's never Purt Sweet? *Don't* tell me he's disguised himself for a nigger minstrel show in that fashion?"

They were all laughing at the unconscious Purt by now—all save Lily; and Chet said, gravely:

"There is something the matter with your eyesight, Short and Long. That's Purt in a brand new outing suit."

"He didn't dress like that to go camping?"

murmured Billy. "Say not so! Somebody dared him to do it!"

It was a fact that the exquisite of Central High had decked himself out in most astonishing array—considering that he was expected to "rough it" in the woods instead of appear at a lawn party on the "Hill."

"His tailor put him up to that suit," chuckled Lance. "He told me so. As he expects to live in the sylvan forest, as did the 'merrie, merrie men' of Robin Hood, Purt is dolled up accordingly."

"Gee!" breathed Bobby. "Do you suppose Robin Hood ever looked like that?"

"That's Lincoln green," announced Lance, trying to keep his face straight. "You notice that the pants are short—knickerbockers, in fact. They are tied just below the knee with 'ribbands' in approved outlaw style."

"Oh, my!" giggled Dora Lockwood. "Do you suppose they hurt him?"

"What hurts him most is the leather belt at which is slung a long-bladed hunting knife so dull that it wouldn't cut cheese! But the knife handle gets in his way every time he stoops."

"Oh! he's so funny!" gasped Dorothy Lockwood. "You boys are certainly going to have a great time with Pretty Sweet on this trip."

"I don't think it is funny at all," muttered Lily Pendleton. "That rude little thing, Billy Long, tries to be too smart."

"But look at the cap!" gasped Laura, who was herself too much amused to ignore the queer get-up of their classmate. "Where did he get the idea of *that?*"

"It's a tam-o'-shanter," said Lance. "Another idea of the tailor's. That tailor, I think, tries things out on Pretty. If Pretty doesn't get shot wearing them, then he puts similar garments on his dummies and risks them outside his shop door."

"But what has he got stuck into the cap?" pursued Laura.

"A feather. Rather, the remains of one," chuckled Lance. "It was quite a long one when he started for the dock this morning; but he crossed the street right under the noses of Si Cumming's team of mules that draws the ice-wagon, and that off mule grabbed the best part of the feather. You know, that mule will eat anything."

"Well, one thing is sure," drawled Bobby. "If Purt is supposed to represent a Sherwood Forest outlaw, and he ever meets one of the outlaws of the Big Woods that he's been worried

about, the latter 'squashbuckler' will be scared to death."

"'Squashbuckler' is good!" chuckled Jess. "Some of those old villains I expect *were* squashes."

"My dear!" ejaculated her mother. "I fear the language you young folk use does not speak well for your instructors of Central High."

"I guess we do not cast much glory upon our teachers, Mrs. Morse," rejoined Laura, laughing.

"It's only Short and Long, here, who 'does the teachers proud,'" said her brother, with a grin. "Hear about what he got off in Ancient History class the other day? Professor Dimp pretty nearly set him back for *that*."

"Aw—now," growled Billy. "He asked for a date, didn't he?"

"What's the burn?" demanded Bobby, briskly.

"Why, Old Dimple asked Billy to mention a memorable date in Roman history, and Billy says: 'Antony's with Cleopatra.'"

"Oh, oh, oh!" gasped Jess. "That's the worst kind of slang."

Mrs. Morse paid the young folk very little attention. She had withdrawn from the group and was busy with pencil and notebook.

"When mother gets to work that way, she heeds neither time, place, nor any passing event,"

laughed Jess. "She expects to sketch out her whole book while she is at camp with us."

"She's going to be a dandy chaperon," declared Chet. "Suppose we'd had Miss Carrington along?"

"Goodness!" groaned Bobby. "Don't let's mention that lady again this summer."

"And we can cut out Old Dimple, too," grumbled Billy Long.

"He's off somewhere on a trip, so we won't have to bother about him," said Chet, with confidence.

The girls had begun to compare notes regarding what they had packed in their suitcases, long before the boats reached Lumberport; and some of them discovered that they had neglected to bring some very essential things.

"You'll just have to tie up beyond the Main Street bridge, and give us a chance to shop, Chet," announced Laura. "We're making good time as it is."

"Isn't that just like a parcel of girls?" grumbled Billy. "Now, we fellows didn't forget a thing—you bet!"

"Wait till we unpack at camp," chuckled Chet. "We'll see about that, then."

He and Lance agreed to make the halt as the girls requested; and they shouted to the crowd on

the smaller boat to do the same. As Lily Pendleton was one of the girls who must shop in Lumberton, Purt Sweet was most willing to tarry and accompany the girls ashore.

He was, in fact, the only escort the girls had when they went up into the town in search of the several articles they needed. The dude was evidently proud of his outing suit and, as Billy suggested, "wanted to give the people of Lumberport a treat."

So he swaggered along up Main Street with the girls. Not a block from the wharf at which the boats were tied he met with an adventure.

"Whatever impression Purt is making on the good people of this town," whispered Nellie Agnew to Laura, "he has certainly smitten a four-footed inhabitant with a deep, deep interest."

"What's that?" asked Laura, turning swiftly to see. Bobby Hargrew looked, likewise. Purt and Lily were behind, and Bobby immediately shouted:

"Say, Purt who's your friend?"

"What's that, Miss Hargrew?" asked Purt staring. "I weally don't get you—don't you know?"

"But he'll get *you* in a minute," chuckled Bobby.

"Don't pay any attention to her, Mr. Sweet," said Lily. "She's a vulgar little thing."

But just then Purt felt something at his heels and turned swiftly. One of the homeliest mongrel curs ever seen was sniffing at Purt's green stockings.

"Get out, you brute!" gasped the dude, rather frightened.

But the dog didn't seem to have any designs upon Purt's thin shanks. Instead, he jumped about, foolishly stiff-legged as a dog will when he thinks he has found a friend, and barked.

"Gee! he's glad to see you," said Bobby. "Where'd you find him, Purt?"

"Weally!" declared the dude, trying to shoo the dog off. "I—I never did see the horrid brute before—I never did."

"Don't call him names. You'll hurt his feelings," suggested one of the Lockwood twins, while Laura said, seriously: "That dog certainly does know you, Mr. Sweet."

"I declare, I never saw him before," said Purt, making frantic efforts to frighten the dog away.

He was a snarly haired dog, with one ear cocked up and the other half chewed off, his coat muddied, only half a tail, which he wiggled ecstatically, and the most foolish looking face that was ever given to a dog.

"Did you ever see such a looking thing?" gasped Bobby, half choked with laughter.

"And how well he matches Purt's suit," said Nellie, demurely.

"I'm not going to walk with you if you don't get rid of that dog!" declared Lily, seeing that many bystanders were laughing at the boy and the mongrel.

She went ahead with the other girls while poor Purt remained in the rear, trying his best to chase away the friendly animal. But the more Purt shooed him, or attempted to hit him, or strove otherwise to send the brute about his business, the more the latter considered that the boy was playing with him, and he welcomed the game with loud and cheerful barks.

Soon a small crowd was collected, watching the performance with broad grins. The girls, giggling, but rather worried by the attention that was being attracted to their escort, darted into a store and left Purt to settle the matter by himself.

CHAPTER VII

THE BARNACLE

THE crowd was laughing loudly and Purt Sweet (although he was frequently the source of mirth for his companions) did not enjoy it. He began to hate that mongrel cur with an intense hatred.

"Get away from me, you brute!" he exclaimed, trying to kick the dog.

"Look out there, son," drawled one on-looker. "If you abuse your dog the S. P. C. A. will do something to you that you won't like."

"It isn't my dog! I weally never saw it before," gasped the dude, growing very warm and red as the dog leaped about him in delight.

"You'll have to tell that to the judge," the man assured him.

This really scared Purt. He did not want to be arrested for abusing the strange dog. But he could not allow it to follow him, that was sure. The girls were already disgusted with him for having attracted the brute.

"And I never meant to!" thought the boy, in despair. "Oh! if I only had him out in the woods, and had a good rock!"

But he dared not pelt the mongrel after what the bystander had said. The crowd became so numerous that a policeman came strolling that way. He saw Purt with the dog dancing about him.

"Here! this is no place for a circus. You and your dog get out!" commanded the officer of the law. "Move on!"

He flourished his baton; the horrified Purt made off around the nearest corner; the dog stuck like a porous plaster.

"If I only had a club!" groaned Purt.

He escaped the crowd and sat down upon a dwelling house stoop. At once that imbecile dog rushed upon him, leaped into his lap, and lapped Purt's face!

"Get out! You nawsty, nawsty brute you!" wailed the dude, beating the dog off weakly.

The latter considered it all in the game. He had taken a decided liking to the boy from Central High, and nothing would drive him away.

Purt had never really cared for dogs. Most boys are tickled enough to get a dog—even a mongrel like this one. But the dude found himself with a possession for which he had never longed.

The dog lay down on the walk in front of him, his tongue hanging on his breast like an inflammatory necktie, and laughing as broadly as a dog *could* laugh. He evidently admired Purt greatly. Whether it was the Lincoln green suit, or the tam-o'-shanter cap, or the dude's personal pulchritude, which most attracted his doggish soul, it was hard to say.

Suddenly a window went up behind Purt and a lady put out her head.

"Little boy! Little boy!" she called, shrilly. "I wish you'd take your dog away from here. I want to let my cat out, and dogs make her *so* nervous."

"It isn't my dog—weally it isn't!" exclaimed Purt, jumping up. Immediately the dog leaped about, barking fit to split his throat.

"You naughty boy!" gasped the lady in the window. "I have seen you with that dog go past here hundreds of times!" and she immediately slammed down the sash before Purt could further defend himself.

However the lady could have made the mistake of thinking she had seen Purt before, is not easily explained. Perhaps she was very near sighted.

The Central High dude "moved on," with the mongrel frisking about him. Purt heartily wished the animal would have a sunstroke (for it was

high noon now, and very warm) or would be taken with an apoplectic stroke, or some other sudden complaint!

Purt wanted to get back to Main Street and rejoin the girls; but he knew it would be no use in trying that unless he could "shake" the dog. The girls (especially Lily Pendleton, whom he so much admired) would not stand for that mongrel brute following in their train.

So, finding that the dog was fastened to him like a new Old Man of the Sea, Prettyman Sweet decided to sneak back to the dock, by the way of back streets, and escape the beast by going aboard the *Duchess*.

He set off, therefore, through several byways, coming out at last on a water-front street of more prominence. Here were stores and tenements. The gutters were crowded with noisy children, and the street with traffic.

A fat butcher stood before his shop, with his thumbs in the string of his apron. When he spied Purt and his close companion, he gave vent to an exclamation of satisfaction and reached for the Central High boy with a mighty hand.

"Here!" he said, hoarsely, his fat face growing scarlet on the instant. "I been waiting for you."

"Waiting for me, Mister?" gasped Purt.

"Weally—that cawn't be, doncher know! I never came this way before."

"No, ye smart Ike! But yer dog has," growled the man, giving Prettyman a shake that seemed to start every tooth in his head.

"Oh, dear me!" cried Purt. "I never saw you before, sir."

"But I've seen yer dog—drat the beast! And if I could ketch him I'd chop him up into sassingers—that's what I'd do to *him*."

"He—he's not my dog," murmured Pert, faintly.

Fido had scurried across the street when he spied the butcher; but he waited there, mouth agape, stump of tail wagging, and a knowing cock to his good ear, to see how his adopted master was coming out with his sworn enemy, the butcher.

"I tell yer what," hoarsely said the butcher, still gripping Purt's shoulder, "a boy can deny his own father, but 'e can't deny his dawg—no, sir! That there brute knows ye, bub. Only yisterday he grabbed several links of frankfurter sassingers off'n this hook right over-head 'ere.

"I ain't goin' to have no dumbed dawg like him come an' grab my sassingers an' make off with 'em, free gratis for nothin'."

A little crowd—little, but deeply interested—

had gathered again. Had Purt been seeking notoriety in Lumberport, he was getting it without doubt!

The grocer next door, with a great guffaw of laughter, cried:

"Hey, Bill! don't blame the dawg. He smelled some o' his relatives, it's likely, in the frankfurters, an' set out to rescue 'em!"

"I do-ent care," breathed the fat butcher, growing more and more excited. "No man's dawg ain't goin' ter do what he done ter me an' git away with it. This boy has got ter pay for what the dawg stole."

Purt did not like to let go of money—among his school chums he was considered a notorious "tight-wad"—but he was willing to do almost anything to get away from the greasy-handed butcher.

"What—what did the dog take? How much were the frankfurters worth?" he stammered. "The dog isn't mine—weally!—but I'll pay——"

"A dollar, then. And I'll lose by it, too," said the butcher, but with an avaricious sparkle in his eye.

"A dollar's worth of frankfurters!" gasped Purt.

"Yes. An' I wish they'd ha' chocked the brute," complained the butcher.

"I wish they had—before he ever saw me," murmured Purt.

He paid over the money and hurried away from the laughing crowd. And there, within a block, the dog was right at his heels again—rather slinkingly, but with the joy of companionship in his eye.

Now Purt was nearing the dock above the Main Street bridge where the motorboats were tied up. Whether the girls had returned or no, he hated to face the other fellows with this mongrel trailing at his heels.

The situation sharpened Purt's wits. Here was a store where was sold rope and other ship-chandlery. He marched in and bought a fathom of strong manilla line, called the foolish dog to him, found that he wore a nondescript collar, and hastily fastened the line to the aforesaid collar.

It was in the boy's mind to tie the dog somewhere and leave it behind. If he had dared, he would have tied a weight to the other end of the rope and dropped both weight and dog overboard.

Just then, however, he met a group of ragged, barefooted urchins—evidently denizens of the water-front. They hailed the gaily dressed Purt and the ragged mongrel, with delight.

"What yer doin' wid the dawg?" inquired one.

"Takin' him to the bench-show, Clarence? He'll win a blue ribbon, *he* will."

"Naw," said another youthful humorist. "They don't let Clarence out without the dawg. That's to keep Clarence from gettin' kidnapped. Nobody would wanter kidnap him if they had ter take that mutt along, too."

Purt was too anxious to be offended by these remarks. He walked directly up to the leader of the gang.

"Say!" he exclaimed, breathlessly. "Do you want a dog?"

"Not if *that's* what yer call a dawg, Mister," said the other boy. I'd be ashamed to call on me tony friends wit' that mutt. What I needs is a coach-dawg to run under the hind axle of me landau."

"Say!" breathed Purt, heavily, and paying no attention to the gibes. "You take this dog and keep it—or tie it up somewhere so he can't follow me—and I'll give you a quarter."

"When do I git the quarter?" demanded the boy.

"Right now," declared Purt reaching into his pocket with his free hand.

"Hand it over," said the other, snatching away the rope.

The dude sighed to think how this strange and

unknown cur had already cost him a dollar and a quarter. A dollar and a quarter would have been far too much to pay for a dozen similar mongrels, and well Purt knew it.

But the instant the quarter was transferred to the other boy, the Central High exquisite traveled away from there just as fast as he could walk.

At once a mournful and heart-rending howl broke out. He looked back once; the dog was leaping at the length of his rope, nearly capsizing the holder of the same with every jump, and wailing hungrily for his fast disappearing friend.

Purt set off on a run. He did not know how soon that rope might break!

He reached the dock just after the girls, who had arrived breathless with laughter, and full of the tale of Purt Sweet's new friend.

"Where is he?" was the chorus that welcomed Purt.

"I—I got rid of him," panted Purt.

"Sure?" laughed Chet, as they began to cast off.

"I—I hope so," returned the worried Purt. "I never *did* see such a cweature—weally."

"He must have been an old friend of yours, Purt," said Reddy Butts. "Dogs don't follow folks for nothing."

"But weally, I never saw him before," Purt tried to explain.

"Aw, that's all very well," Billy Long sang out. "But it's plain enough why he followed you."

"Why?" asked Reddy, willing to help the joke along.

"It was Purt's shanks in those green socks that attracted the dog. I suppose the poor dog was hungry, and a hungry dog will go far for a bone, you know."

Purt was hurrying to get his *Duchess* under way, and he was so glad of getting rid of the dog that he did not mind the boys' chaffing. Suddenly a wild yell arose from some of the boys on the dock.

"What's this? See who's come!" yelled Billy Long.

"The Barnacle!" quoth Chet, bursting into a roar of laughter.

Even Lily Pendleton could not forbear giving vent to her amusement, and she laughed with the others. Down the dock tore the ragged coated dog, with a fathom of rope tied to his collar.

He leaped aboard the *Bonnie Lass* and then, with a glad yelp, sprang to the decked-over part of the *Duchess*.

Purt Sweet looked up with a cry of amazement

and received the delighted dog full in his chest. They rolled together in the cockpit of the boat, the dog eagerly lapping Purt's face, while the boy tried to beat him off with his fists.

"The Barnacle!" yelled Chet again, and that name stuck.

So did the dog. He refused to leave. The party left Lumberton with the foolish beast sitting up in the prow of the *Duchess*, wagging his ridiculous tail and barking a last farewell to the amused spectators gathered along the edge of the dock.

CHAPTER VIII

UP ROCKY RIVER

The second start of the flotilla—that from Lumberton—was a hilarious start indeed. Poor Prettyman Sweet was the butt of everybody's laughter. The glare of rage he threw now and then at the ridiculous dog in the bow of the *Duchess* sent the boys into spasms of laughter.

The girls in the other motorboat—even Bobby—seeing that their laughter quite offended Lily Pendleton, began talking about something else and ignored the Barnacle, as the dog had been so aptly named.

Reddy Butts and Art Hobbs, however, loved to annoy the Central High dude. They told Purt that the Barnacle possessed a family resemblance to the Sweets that could not be denied.

"He smiles just like you do, Pretty," said Arthur. "I declare I wouldn't deny the relationship."

"You fellows think you are funny," snarled

the dude, losing his temper at last. "I'll fix that beast!"

"How you going to do it?" demanded Reddy, grinning.

"You come here and take the wheel," commanded the dude. "See that you steer right and keep in the channel, right behind Chet's boat and his tow."

"All right," said Butts, and took the spokes in hand.

Purt, shooting an inquiring glance forward to see if the girls were watching, began to creep up on the dog. The beast was looking over the bow, his tongue hanging out, and evidently enjoying the rapid sail up Rocky River.

Somebody had removed the rope from his collar since he had come aboard the *Duchess*. There was nothing for Purt to grab had the dog observed his approach and sought to get away.

However, the dog remained unconscious of the attempt on his peace of mind. Purt crept nearer and nearer, while the giggling boys in the cockpit watched him narrowly.

Reddy looked knowingly at Arthur, and the latter pulled off his jacket and kicked off his sneakers. The water was warm and Arthur was a good swimmer.

The dude, earnestly striving to move softly,

got within hand's reach of the dog. Suddenly he threw himself forward. At the same moment Reddy twisted the wheel ever so little to starboard.

The *Duchess* was traveling at a good clip. The wave at her nose was foam-streaked and spreading broadly. The water in her wake boiled.

The sudden thrust Purt gave the dog cast the surprised brute overboard; with a yelp of amazement he sank beneath the foam-streaked surface as the motorboat rushed on.

But another yelp echoed the dog's; when Reddy Butts swerved the boat's nose, the move was quite unexpected by Purt.

He dove forward, yelled loudly, and was cast over the edge of the deck just as sprawlingly as the Barnacle himself!

"Man overboard!" yelled Reddy, scarcely able to say it for laughter.

The crowd on the other powerboat heard the shout, if they had not all seen Purt's exhibition of diving. The dude went under just as deep as the dog, and did not come to the surface anywhere near as quickly.

The Barnacle, whether he was a water-dog, or not, was a good swimmer. When his head shot above the stream he yelped, started to paddle after the *Duchess* and her tow, saw that that was

useless, and turned toward the southerly bank of the stream.

The river was half a mile wide at this place, and the Barnacle left a wake like a motorboat behind him. He was going to reach the shore all right.

How about the master he had adopted? Purt came to the surface more slowly, but when he got there he emitted a shriek like a steam whistle.

The *Duchess* had gone ahead of him. Arthur Hobbs was poised to leap overboard; but there swept close to the dude one of the trailing canoes, and just by raising an arm Purt reached it.

He clung to the gunwale and was dragged on behind the *Duchess*. At first the canoe tipped and threatened to turn over; Purt slipped along to the stern, and there got a grip on both sides, and so trailed on behind, getting his breath.

"He's all right," said Reddy, chuckling. "Let him cool off a little, Art."

The girls aboard the *Bonnie Lass* were somewhat worried over Purt Sweet's predicament. "He'll be drowned!" Lily Pendeton declared, first of all.

"I'm not afraid of that," Bobby said. "But if that suit of his shrinks, what a sight he'll be!"

"This is no time for light talk," declared Jess Morse. "Purt isn't a very good swimmer."

"Well!" exclaimed Nellie, rather tartly for her, "how did he know whether that poor dog could swim, or not?"

"Looks as though he had finally gotten rid of the Barnacle, just the same," laughed Laura.

"We'll see about that," responded her brother, darkly. "That dog has the stick-to-it-iveness of fish-glue. Wait and see."

Meanwhile Arthur Hobbs drew in the canoe Purt was clinging to, and soon helped the gasping dude into the large boat.

"Oh! oh!" cried Purt. "I might have known that horrid dog was bad luck."

Having seen the exquisite dragged aboard the *Duchess*, most of the girls on the other power-boat gave their attention to the dog. Indeed, his fate all the time had attracted more attention from Lizzie Bean, than had the trouble Purt Sweet was in.

"Why! he might have been drowned!" Lily exclaimed in answer to something Bobby said.

"That's right. And it would be too mean," spoke up Lonesome Liz, as Billy Long secretly called the sad-faced girl. "He's a smart dog."

"Mercy! who cares about that horrid dog?" snapped Lily.

"I do, for one," said Nellie Agnew.

"Me, too. He was pushed overboard by Purt,

and it just served Purt right that he went into the water," Bobby declared.

The mongrel cur had swum nobly for the shore. Before Purt was dragged aboard by Art the dog was nearing his goal.

They were well above the town of Lumberport now, and the shore along here was a shelving beach. After fighting the current the dog would have beeen unable to drag himself out had the bank been steep.

"He's done it!" exclaimed Liz, eagerly. "Well! I declare I'm glad."

"Gladder than you were over Purt?" chuckled Bobby.

"Well, if you ask me," drawled the maid-of-all-work, "I think the dog's wuth a whole lot more than that silly feller in the green pants."

"How horrid!" ejaculated Lily.

"Gee!" said Bobby. "Don't you know, Lizzie, that there is only *one* Pretty Sweet? I don't suppose you could find another fellow like him if you combed the zones of both hemispheres."

"Hear! hear!" drawled Jess. "How many zones do you suppose there are, Bobs?"

"Oh, a whole bunch of them," declared the reckless Bobby. "There's one torrid, two temperate, two frigid, and a lot of postal zones."

"How smart!" sneered Lily, in no very good temper.

Meanwhile the dog had crawled out of the water. They saw him shake himself and then sink upon the shore, evidently exhausted.

"Well," said Laura, "I guess Purt has finally gotten rid of the poor creature. But it *was* too funny for anything."

The shores of Rocky River, as they advanced, were very pretty indeed. There were several suburban villages near Lumberport; but the farther they sailed up the stream the less inhabited the shores were and the wilder the scenery became.

"My!" ejaculated Dorothy. "I had no idea this country was really so *woodsy*."

"You know there is scarcely anything but forest south of us, until you reach the B. & P. W. Railroad."

"Maybe there are bad people up in these woods, after all," suggested the timid Nell.

"Never you mind. Purt's got his revolver," chuckled Jess. "Lance says that it is one that hasn't been fired for twenty years and belonged to Purt's father."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Laura. "I *shall* be afraid of that. It's those old guns that nobody supposes are loaded, that are always going off and killing the innocent bystander. You ought to confiscate that gun, Chet."

"Don't worry," returned her brother, laughing.

"I've taken the trigger screw out of Purt's gun and he couldn't shoot it if he had forty cartridges in it. But I haven't told Purt, for the dear boy seems to place implicit confidence in the old gat as a defense against anything on two or four legs in the Big Woods."

CHAPTER IX

THE CAMP ON ACORN ISLAND

ALTHOUGH it was high noon when they were at Lumberport the Girls of Central High and their boy friends had not lunched there. Indeed, they waited to reach a certain pleasant grove which some of them knew about, on the south shore of the river, and several miles above the spot where Purt Sweet had taken his involuntary ducking.

As the motorboats put ashore and the boys tied them to stubs in the high bank, they all began joking Purt about his plunge into the river. The dude had been obliged to exchange his natty outing suit of Lincoln green for a suit of oil-stained overalls that he found in the cabin of the *Duchess*. He could not find his own baggage, as the boys with him had hidden it.

As for the tam-o'-shanter, it had fallen off and floated down the stream. Purt would never see that remarkable headgear again.

"But that isn't what the boy is worrying

about," chuckled Lancelot Darby, as the party came ashore with the luncheon hampers. "It's the fate of the Barnacle that is corroding Purt's sensitive soul!"

"How do you make that out?" demanded Reddy Butts, broadly grinning.

"Why, isn't it a fact that he went in after the dog? I saw him dive right after the poor thing when it fell overboard. It was a mighty brave attempt at rescue, I should say—especially when we all know that Purt swims about as good as a stone fence."

"Some hero, Purt is," agreed Billy Long, chuckling.

"And didn't he make that dive gracefully?" demanded Reddy, bursting with laughter to think how he had shot the dude overboard by a sly twist of the wheel on the *Duchess*.

Purt was really ashamed of his present appearance. He felt it necessary to excuse it to the girls.

"Weally," he said, when he came ashore, "I am not pwesentible; but I hope you ladies understand that it was an unavoidable accident."

"I don't know about that," said Laura, gravely.

"Oh! I assure you, Miss Belding," Purt hastened to say, "I had no intention of going overboard—weally!"

"So you were not actually trying to rescue the dog?" demanded Jess.

"That howwible cweature!" gasped Purt, in disgust. "I would fling him from the tallest cliff there is—could I safely do so."

"And not try to dive after him—eh?" chuckled Bobby.

"You are cruelty incarnate!" exclaimed Jess, gravely. "I am horrified to find that we have a boy at Central High who would willingly destroy such a beautiful—Oh! oh!" shrieked Jess, who had been facing a thick path of woods below this open camping place. "What is *that?* It's a bear!" she concluded, asking and answering the question herself.

She started in a very lively fashion for the boats. Some of the other girls were quite as agile. Like the word "mouse" in domestic scenes, the cry of "Bear!" in ruder surroundings "always gets a rise out of the girls," as Chet Belding slangily expressed it.

But it was not a bear. Purt Sweet was stooping to aid in blowing up the flame of the campfire over which they proposed making Mrs. Morse a cup of tea. He did not see the "bear" coming.

But the other boys recognized the object that had so frightened Jess, and they burst into a roar of laughter. Out of the bushes and across the

opening in the wood came a half wet, bedraggled dog, which, with a joyful whine, leaped upon the individual who had so fatally attracted his doggish love and loyalty!

"The Barnacle!" yelled Chet. "What did I tell you? Talk about 'the cat coming back?' Crickey! the cat wasn't in it with this mongrel of Purt's."

In the exuberance of his joy Barnacle fairly pitched Purt across the fire, and tipped over the pail of water that had been hung over it to boil. The dude seemed fated to fall into trouble on this first day of the outing.

But now Purt was mad! He scrambled up, found a club, and chased the barking Barnacle all about the camp. The dog would not be chased away. Perhaps he had observed Lizzie opening the lunch baskets. Besides, he seemed to take everything Purt tried to do to him as a game of play.

"Do leave the dog alone, Purt!" exclaimed Lil, at last. "You're making yourself perfectly ridiculous."

Lily Pendleton's opinion had weight with Pretty Sweet. He sat down, gloomy and breathless, and tried to ignore the Barnacle.

The latter sat on his tail all through the *al fresco* meal, directly behind Purt. The dude gave

him no attention; but the other boys threw pieces of meat and sweet crackers into the air for the Barnacle to catch.

Could he catch them? Why! it seemed as though the dog must have been trained for just that trick. He never missed a bite!

When his appetite was satisfied the mongrel began to try to attract Purt's attention. Every time Purt reached for anything, the Barnacle's cold, wet nose was right there! It was a plain case of "love at first sight," as Bobby remarked. Nothing could convince that dog that Purt was not his loving friend.

But finally the dude's serious air and his efforts to reach the dog with a particularly well-shod foot, made an impression on the Barnacle. He squatted down before Purt and lifting up his head, uttered a howl that would have brought tears to the eyes of a graven image.

"You'll break the poor dog's heart, Purt," said Jess, gravely. "Give him a kind word."

"He has the most sorrowful face on him of any dog I ever saw," declared Dora Lockwood. "Look at him kindly, even if you can't speak."

"Yes," whispered Dorothy, her twin. "He has almost as sorrowful a face as Lizzie's."

"Gee! there's a pair of them," sighed Bobby, ecstatically. "Let's take the dog with us to be a comrade for Liz."

Indeed, Lizzie Bean petted the mongrel, which hung around the camp until the picnickers started up the river again.

There was another disturbance when Purt tried to slip aboard the *Duchess* without the dog. The Barnacle whined, and howled, and jumped aboard, and was finally driven ashore with an oar.

The motorboats and their tows got off into the stream. There sat the deserted dog on his tail, howling most dismally as the boats drew up stream and left him behind.

Laura called to Purt in the other boat: "Never mind, Mr. Sweet, I don't think you'll be troubled with that dog any more. It's twenty miles to Lake Dunkirk. He will never follow you that far."

"I bet the Barnacle haunts Purt in his dreams," exclaimed Bobby.

"Oh! say not so!" begged Billy Long. "If Purt has the nightmare and draws that 'family friend,' the faithful revolver, on the ghost of the dog—Good-*night!* Like enough he'll blow us all out of the tent."

"I bet that Barnacle dogs his 'feetsteps' for the rest of Purt's mortal existence," declared Chet, prophetically.

"One thing," said Lil Pendleton, "the nasty beast can't follow us to Acorn Island."

"And we won't get there ourselves to-day, if we don't hurry," Chet said. "Come on, Pretty! let's see what your little *Duchess* can do," and he speeded up the engine of the *Bonnie Lass.*

"We have some distance to go, that's a fact," said Nellie. "The island is two miles beyond the end of Rocky River."

The bigger powerboat pulled away from the *Duchess* and the two parties ceased shouting back and forth. Mrs. Morse was trying to get a nap, so the girls did not sing. But they told jokes and stories, and of course Bobby gave one of her jingles:

"'There was an old man of Nantasket
Who went to sea in a basket:
When up came a shark,
Swallowed him and his bark——
Now, wasn't that a fine funeral casket?'"

"Oh! I can beat that one," cried Jess.

"Let's hear you," responded the black-eyed miss.

"Listen, then," returned her schoolmate:

"'A canny young canner of Cannee,
One morning observed to his Granny,
"A canner can can
A lot of things, Gran,
But a canner can't can a can, can 'e?"'

Now, how is that for a match for *your* limerick?"

This started the ball a-rolling. Dora Lockwood raised her hand, crying,

"Please, teacher! I have one," and immediately produced this:

"'There was a small boy who lived in Jamaica,
Who bought a lobster wrapped in a brown paper;
The paper was thin
And the lobster grabbed him——
What an awful condition that small boy was in!'"

This woke up Dorothy Lockwood, who would not be outdone by her twin. She recited:

"'In Huron, a hewer, Hugh Hughes,
Hued yew-trees of unusual hues.
Hugh Hughes used blue yews
To build sheds for his ewes;
So his ewes a blue-hued yew shed use.'"

"Great Scott, girl!" gasped Chet. "That almost twisted your tongue out of kilter."

"Any more?" queried Lance, who likewise had wonderingly listened to this display of talent. "Ah–ha! I see Nellie just bursting with one.

"Yes. I have a good one," admitted the doctor's daughter. "Hear it:

"'A right-handed writer named Wright
In writing "write" always wrote "rite."
Where he meant to write "write,"
If he'd written "write" right,
Wright would not have wrought rot writing
"rite."'

Now! let's hear you say *that* fast?"

This certainly was a teaser and the boys admitted it. Finally somebody shouted for Mother Wit. "Come on, Laura! where are you?" demanded Bobby. "Are you going to let us mere 'amachoors' beat you? Give us a limerick."

Mother Wit was expected to keep up with the other wits, that was sure. So she obliged with:

"'A smart young fisher named Fischer,
Fished for fish from the edge of a fissure.
A fish, with a grin,
Pulled the fisherman in.
Now they're fishing the fissure for Fischer.'

And now, boys, while we have been entertaining you," concluded Laura, "you have gotten behind the *Duchess* again."

"That's right, Lance," said Chet. "Give her some more power."

"Electricity is a wonderful thing," said Jess, seriously. "Just think how fast it travels."

"How fast?" demanded Bobby.

"Something like 250,000 miles a second, I read somewhere."

"And so," remarked Bobby, grinning, "if it hits anybody, it tells the judge it was going about ten miles an hour."

They were out for a good time and could laugh at almost anything that was said, or was done. Freed from what Bobby called "the scholastic yoke," the whole world seemed a big joke to them.

"I know we're going to have the finest kind of a time at Acorn Island!" the cut-up exclaimed.

"Well! I hope there's nothing much to do there to-night, save to eat supper," Jess said, yawning. "So much ozone is already making me sleepy."

"Father Tom promised to have a man there to meet us, who would even have the fire going and the teakettle boiling," said Bobby. "You see, he's been up here hunting and fishing, and these guides all know him. He can get what he wants from them."

The boats chugged on up the river and finally, as the evening began to draw in, they sighted the broadening sheet of water which they knew to be

Lake Dunkirk. The lake was longer, but much narrower, than Lake Luna, and it was surrounded by an unbroken line of forest.

The sun was setting. Its last beams shone upon the island which lay about two miles above the entrance to Rocky River, and that island looked like an emerald floating on the blue water.

The light was fast fading out of the sky, save where the west was still riotous with colors. The big oaks on Acorn Island grew black as the shadows gathered beneath them.

At the nearer end was the hillock where they were to camp. Here the grove was open and they could see the cabin standing, with two tents beside it. One of the tents had a raised flap, and there was the stovepipe with a curl of smoke coming out of it.

Down at the edge of the shore—a smooth and sheltered bit of beach where the landing was easy—a man was sitting, smoking his pipe. A beautiful canoe, of Indian manufacture, had its bow drawn up beside him.

The boys and girls shouted a welcome as they drove in toward the shore. He rose, knocking the ashes from his pipe, and waved a hand toward the camp above. He was a tall man, almost as black as a negro, with long, black hair, and was barefooted.

"All right!" he grunted, gutterally. Then he pushed off, stepped into his canoe, and paddled away without another word.

The boats were beached and the young people began to disembark. Before the guide in the canoe got half way to the northern shore of the lake, he was lost to their sight, the darkness came down so suddenly.

CHAPTER X

GETTING USED TO IT

The boys were in haste to get to their own camping site, which was across from the island on the southern shore of Lake Dunkirk. So they hurried the baggage belonging to Mrs. Morse and the girls to the cabin, and then prepared to embark again with their own boats.

Chet saw to it that everything appeared to be in good shape about the camp on the island knoll, and he drew up the three canoes belonging to the girls, himself.

"Now, if you girls get into trouble to-night, toot this thing," and Chet produced an automobile horn which he had brought along for the purpose. "If you need us by day, Laura knows how to wig-wag with those flags. I taught her."

"For pity's sake, Chet!" exclaimed Jess, with some asperity. "Do you suppose we are going to need you boys every hour, or so?"

"I hope not!" added Lil Pendleton. "Surely we ought to be able to get along in camp just as well as you boys."

"Hear! hear!" cried Bobby. "How are you going to summon *us* if you need help, my dear little boys? Sha'n't we give you each a penny whistle so you can call us?"

Chet only laughed. Lance said: "We've been camping before; most of you girls haven't. Of course you will get into trouble forty times to our once."

"Well! I like that," sniffed Jess, who did not like it at all. "If girls aren't just as well able to take care of themselves, as boys, I'd like to know why."

"Jess is getting to be a regular suffragette," chuckled Dora Lockwood.

"Reminds me of the little girl whose mother was chasing the hens out of the garden," said Laura, with her low laugh. "The hen-chaser declared that 'You can't teach a hen anything, to save your life,' when the little girl spoke up for her sex, and said: 'Well! I think they know quite as much as the roosters!'"

"And that's all right," teased Lance, as the boys got under way. "I bet this bunch of hens on Acorn Island will holler for us roosters before we set the distress signal for *them*."

"Get out, you horrid thing!" cried Bobby. "Calling us hens. We're only pullets, at best."

A lantern had been lit in each tent, for the shad-

ows were thickening under the oak trees on the knoll. Lizzie Bean at once began to overhaul the cooking utensils and supplies in the cook-tent.

This tent was divided into two parts. Lizzie's own cot was in the rear apartment. There was a long table, roughly built but serviceable, in the front with the stove and chest of drawers. There were folding campstools in plenty.

In the cabin was a comfortable straw mattress for Mrs. Morse in the wide bunk, a small table on which her typewriter case already stood, a rocker made in rustic fashion, a painted dressing case with mirror of good size, and shelves for books.

A small fire was burning on the hearth, for the cabin was apt to be damp after its many months of abandonment. It had been swept and garnished with boughs of sweet-smelling spruce and pine.

The girls' sleeping tent housed seven cots, all supplied with unbleached cotton sheets and heavy double blankets. Lil Pendleton looked about it when she brought in her bag, and shivered.

"Goodness!" she said. "I'm glad we're 'way out here in the wilderness if we're going to dress and undress in this thing. Why! I shall feel just as much exposed as though the sides were made of window-glass."

"What nonsense!" sniffed Bobby, who had

been camping with her father and had spent many a night in a tent. "You're too particular, Lil."

"Who asked *you* to put in your oar?" demanded Miss Pendleton, crossly. "I have a right to my opinion, I hope."

"I should hope it was nobody else's opinion," returned Miss Bobby, quick to pick up the gauntlet.

"Hush, girls!" advised Mother Wit. "Let us not be quarrelsome. We don't want Mrs. Morse to think we are female savages right at the start."

Lil sniffed; but good-tempered Bobby said, quickly: "You're right, Laura. I beg the company's pardon—and Lil's particularly. We must be 'little birds who in their nest agree.'"

"You're a fine bird, Bobby," laughed Dora. "Come on! I hear the dishes rattling. Let's see what Lizzie has tossed up for supper."

"I wonder if she managed to boil the water without burning it?" giggled Jess. "She's the funniest girl!"

"I should think you and Laura could have found a maid who wasn't quite such a gawk," muttered Lil, unpleasantly.

"Hush!" admonished Mother Wit. "Don't let her hear you."

"Why not?" snapped Lil.

"You will hurt her feelings."

"Pooh! she's paid for it——"

"Not for having her feelings hurt," declared Laura, sternly. "And I won't have it. She's odd; but she is quite as quick of hearing as the next person."

"Aw, you're too particular, Laura," drawled Lil. But she stood a little in awe of Mother Wit.

They joined Mrs. Morse and filed into the cook-tent. Lizzie's flushed face appeared behind the steaming biscuits and a big platter of ham and eggs. They did not really know how hungry they were until they sat down to these viands.

Lizzie stood with arms akimbo and waited for the verdict upon the cooking.

"Most excellent, Lizzie," Mrs. Morse said, kindly.

"Suits ye, does it?" asked the strange girl. "I flatter myself them biscuits air light enough to sleep on."

"They are a good deal more feathery than our 'downy couches' here in camp, I warrant, Lizzie," laughed Laura.

"Glad ye like 'em. There's plenty of biscuits—don't be bashful."

Jess giggled when she saw Lil's face. "How rude!" muttered Miss Pendleton. "I don't see what you and Mother Wit were thinking about when you hired that girl."

"Thinking of you, Lily—thinking of you," declared Jess. "She will willingly do your share of the dish-washing."

"Dish-washing? Fancy!" exclaimed Lil. "I'd like to see myself!"

"Well I wouldn't," put in the omnipresent Bobby. "Not if I had to eat after your manipulation of the dish-mop."

"But we didn't come to do anything like *that*," wailed Lil.

"Just the same we have got to do a part of the camp work," declared Mither Wit. "It all can't be shoved off onto Lizzie."

"Let us arrange about that right here and now," suggested Mrs. Morse.

"Oh, Mrs. Morse!" cried Nell, eagerly. "First of all I vote that Mrs. Morse is not called upon to do a thing! She's company as well as chaperon."

"I will make my own bed," said the lady, smiling. "You girls can take turns sweeping and dusting the cabin, if you like."

"And making the beds and cleaning up our tent," added Laura. "Two at a time—it won't seem so hard if two work together."

"A good idea," agreed Mrs. Morse.

"But that leaves an odd girl," suggested Jess.

"We'll change about. The odd girl shall help

the cook. And one meal a day—either breakfast, dinner, or supper—we girls must cook, and Lizzie is going to have nothing to do with that meal."

"Why! *I* can't cook," wailed Lil again.

"Good time for you to begin to learn, then," Laura said, laughingly.

Some of the other girls looked disturbed at the prospect. "I can make fudge," observed Nell, honestly, "but I never really tried anything else, except to make toast and tea for mother when she was ill and the maid was out."

"Listen to that!" exclaimed the voice of Lizzie Bean, who had been listening frankly to the dialogue. "An' I been doin' plain cookin' an' heavy sweepin' and hard scrubbin' ever since I was knee-high to a toadstool!"

Bobby burst out laughing. "So have I, Lizzie!" she cried. "Only I have done it for Father Tom and my kid brothers and sisters when Mrs. Betsey was sick."

Lily Pendleton turned up her nose—literally. "We're going to have trouble with that girl," she announced to Nellie. "She doesn't know her place."

But whatever Lizzie knew, or did not know, she did not shirk her share of the work. She stayed up after everybody else had retired and washed

every pot and pan and plate, and set her bread to rise for morning, and stirred up a big pitcher of flapjack flour to rise over night, peeled potatoes to fry, leaving them in cold water so they would not turn black, and set the long table fresh for breakfast.

When the earliest riser among the girls (who was Laura herself) peeped into the cooking tent at daybreak, the fire in the stove was already roaring, and Lizzie had gone down to the shore to wash her face and hands in the cold water. Laura ran down in her bathing suit.

"What do you think of this place, Lizzie?" she asked the solemn-faced girl.

"For the land's sake, Miss!" drawled Lizzie Bean, "I never had no idea the woods was so lonesome—for a fac'."

"No?"

"I sh'd say not! I went to bed and lay there an' listened. The trees creaked, and the crickets twittered, and some bird had the nightmare an' kep' cryin' like a baby——"

"I expect that was a screech-owl, Lizzie," interrupted Laura. "They come out only at night."

"Goodness to gracious! Do they come out *every* night?" demanded the girl.

"I expect so."

"And them frogs?"

"They are tree-toads. Yes, they are here all summer, I guess."

"Goodness to gracious! And folks like to live in the woods? Well!"

"Do you think you can stand it?" queried Laura, much amused, yet somewhat anxious, too.

"As long as I'm goin' to get all that money every week it'll take more than birds with the nightmare an' a passel of frogs to drive me away. Now! when do you want breakfast, Miss?"

"Not until Mrs. Morse gets up. And none of the other girls are out yet," said Laura.

But very soon the other girls began to appear. They had agreed to have a dip the first thing, and the girls who first got into the water squealed so because of the cold, that it routed out the lie-abeds.

Lily would not venture in. She sat on a stump, with a blanket wrapped around her, and shivered, and yawned, and refused to plunge in with the others.

"And it's so early," she complained. "I had no idea you'd all get up so early and make such a racket. Why, when there isn't school, I *never* get up before nine o'clock."

"Ah! how different your life is going to be on

Acorn Island," said Bobby, frankly. "You'll be a new girl by the time we go back home."

"I don't want to be a new girl," grumbled Lily.

"Now, isn't that just like her?" said Bobby, *sotto voce*. "She is perfectly satisfied with herself as she is. Humph! Lucky she *is* satisfied, I s'pose, for nobody else could be!"

CHAPTER XI

LIZ SEES A "HA'NT"

AFTER their bath the girls got into their gymnasium costumes. Then they clamored for breakfast, and had Mrs. Morse not appeared just then there certainly would have been a riot at the cook-tent. Lizzie was a stickler for orders, and she would not begin to fry cakes until Jess' mother gave the signal.

Flapjacks! My! weren't they good, with butter and syrup, followed by bacon and eggs and French fried potatoes? The girls ate for a solid hour. Lizzie's face was the color of a well-burned brick when the girls admitted they were satisfied. The out-of-door air had given even Lil an enormous appetite.

"If my mother had any idea that I'd eat so much at this time in the morning she'd never have let me come camping," she said. "Why! do you know—I only drink a cup of coffee and pick the inside out of a roll, at breakfast, at home."

There was a general inclination to "laze"

about the camp and read, or take naps after that heavy breakfast. But Laura would not allow the other six girls of Central High any peace.

"Of course, we have a big ham and a case of eggs with us," said Mother Wit. "But we don't want to eat ham and eggs, or bacon and eggs, three times a day while we stay here.

"Beside, the eggs, at least, won't hold out. We must add to the larder——"

"What shall we do?" asked Dora Lockwood. "Paddle to the mainland and kill some farmer's cow to get beef?"

"No, indeed," Laura said, laughing. "We must, however, make an attempt to coax some of the finny denizens of the lake out of it and into Lizzie's fry-pan."

"Fishing!" cried Dorothy.

"I never went fishing in my life," complained Lil.

But the other girls of Central High were not like Lil—no, indeed! They had been out with the boys on Lake Luna—both in summer and winter—and every one of them knew how to put a worm on a hook.

Lil squealed at the thought of "using one of the squirmy things."

"Aw, you give me a pain!" said Bobby. "Don't act as though you were made of some-

thing different from the rest of us. A worm never bit me yet, and I've been fishing thousands of times, I guess."

Lil did not hear her, however. She was the only girl who had not brought fishing tackle. When she saw her six schoolmates going about the work of tolling the finny denizens of Lake Dunkirk onto the bank, she began to be jealous of the fun they were having. White perch, and roach, and now and then a lake trout, were being landed.

Lil got excited. She wanted to try her hand at the sport, too. Yes! Bobby had an extra outfit, and she even cut Lil a pole.

"But I tell you what it is, Miss," said the black-eyed girl, "I'm going to hold you responsible for this outfit. If you break anything, or lose anything, or snarl the line up, you'll have to pay me for it. I paid good money for that silk line and those hooks."

Lil promised to make good if anything happened to the fishing tackle. She took her place on a rock near Bobby and made a cast. The other girls were very busy themselves and paid Lil very little attention.

The fish were biting freely, for the morning was cloudy and these waters about Acorn Island were far from being "fished out." Bobby hauled

in a couple of perch and had almost forgotten about Lil, when the latter said, mournfully:

"Say, Clara."

"Well! what is it?" demanded the other.

"What do you call that little thing that bobbed up and down on the water?"

"The float," replied the busy Bobby.

"Well, Clara!" whined Lil, mournfully.

"Well! what is it?" snapped the busy fisherman.

"I'll have to buy you a new one."

"Buy me *what?*" demanded the surprised Bobby.

"A new float."

"What for?" was the amazed demand.

"Because that one you lent me *has sunk*," mourned Lily.

"For goodness' sake!" shrieked Bobby. "You've got a bite!"

She dropped her own pole, ran to the amazed Lily, and dragged in a big bullpout—sometimes called "catfish"—that was sulking in the mud at the bottom, with Lil's hook firmly fastened in its jaws.

Lil shrieked. She would not touch the wriggling, black fish. She was afraid of being "horned," she said!

Bobby put her foot on the fish and managed to

extract the hook. Then she baited the hook again and bade Lil try her luck once more.

But the amateur fisherman was doomed to ill-luck on this occasion. She had scarcely dropped the bait into the water, when a fierce little head appeared right at the surface. It swallowed the bait—hook and all—at a gulp, and swam right toward the shore where Lil stood.

She began to squeal again: "A snake! a snake! Oh, Bobby, I'm deathly afraid of snakes."

"So am I," rejoined Bobby. "But you won't catch a snake in the water with a hook and line."

"*I've caught one!*" gasped the frightened Lil.

"Gee!" growled Bobby. "You're more trouble than a box of bald-headed monkeys. What is the matter—Oo! it's a snapper!"

"A what?" cried Lil, dropping the fishpole.

"A snapping turtle," explained Bobby. "Now you *have* caught it! I'll lose hook and all, like enough."

She jerked the turtle ashore. Lil had seen only its reptilian head. The beast proved to be more than a foot across.

"Makes bully soup," said the practical Bobby. "But he won't willingly let go of that bait and the hook in a month of Sundays."

She ran up to the camp and came flying back in a minute with the camp-hatchet. Lil grew bold

enough to hold the line taut. The turtle pulled back, and Bobby caught it just right and cut its head off!"

Although Lonesome Liz had never seen a turtle before, she managed to clean it and with Mrs. Morse's advice made a pot of soup. Lizzie was getting bolder as the hours passed; but she announced to Laura that she believed there must be "ha'nts" in the woods.

"What is a haunt?" asked Laura, curiously.

"Dead folks that ain't contented in their minds," declared the queer girl.

"And why should the spirits of the dead haunt *these* woods?" asked Laura. "Seems to me it's an awfully out of the way place for dead people to come to."

But Lizzie would not give up her belief in the "spooks."

That first day in camp the girls had no visitors. Through their binoculars and opera glasses, they could see the boys very active about their camp across the lake. It was plain they were too busy to visit Acorn Island.

The girls of Central High, however, had plenty of fun without the boys. Only Bobby declared that Lil principally spent the time staring through her opera glasses across the lake, wishing Purt would come over in the *Duchess;* but Lil angrily denied *that.*

"And you stop trying to stir up a rumpus, Miss," commanded Laura, to the cut-up. "Let us live, if we can, like a Happy Family."

"My!" drawled Jess, "Mother Wit is nothing if not optimistic."

"Ha! what is your idea of an optimist?" demanded Nellie Agnew.

"Why," Jess said, smiling quietly, "I read of a real optimist once. He was strolling along a country road and an automobile came along and hit him in the back. It knocked him twenty feet.

"'Oh, well!' said he, as he got up, 'I was going in this direction, anyway.'"

"Aw, say!" put in Bobby, "that's all right for a *story;* but *my* idea of a real optimist is a man who's dead broke, going into a restaurant and ordering oysters on the half shell with the hope that he can pay for the dinner by finding a pearl in one of the bivalves."

They all laughed at that, and then Laura said:

"To get back to our original conversation, let us see if we can't get on in *this* camp without friction. And that means that *you,* Bobby, must set a watch on your tongue."

"What do you suppose my tongue is—a timekeeper?" cried the irreverent Bobby.

Laura herself helped get dinner, the main dish of which was fried fish. And how good they tasted, fresh out of the lake!

Mrs. Morse had kept her typewriter tapping at a swift pace in the cabin, and she could scarcely be coaxed to leave her story long enough to eat dinner.

"This quietude is an incentive to good work," she said, reflectively, at table. "I shall be sorry to go back to town."

But it was very early in their experience to say *that*. Lizzie Bean was not yet an enthusiast for the simple life, that was sure. She and Mother Wit had gotten better acquainted during the preparations for the noonday meal.

"I ain't never been crazy about the country myself," admitted Liz. "Cows, and bugs, and muskeeters, and frogs, don't seem so int'restin' to me as steam cars, and pitcher shows, and sody-water fountains, and street pianners.

"I like the crowds, I do. A place where all ye hear all day is a mowin' merchine clackin', or see a hoss switchin' his tail to keep off the blue-bottles, didn't never coax me, *much*."

"The bucolic life does not tempt you, then?" said Laura, her eyes twinkling.

"Never heard it called that afore. Colic's a serious thing—'specially with babies. But the city suits me, I can tell ye," said Liz.

"I never seen no-one that liked the woods like you gals seem to before, 'ceptin' a feller that lived

in the boardin' house I worked at in Albany. He was a bug on campin' and fishin' and gunnin', and all that."

"Did you work in Albany?" queried Laura, surprised.

"Yep. Last year. I had a right good place, too. Plenty of work. I got up at four o'clock in the mornin' and I never *did* get through at night!"

"Oh, my!"

"Yep. I love work. It keeps yer mind off yer troubles, if you have enough and plenty to do. But if yer have too much of it, yer get fed up, as ye might say. I didn't get time to sleep."

Laura had to laugh at that.

"Yep. That chap I tell you about was the nicest chap I ever see. He was kind to me, too. When I cut my thumb most off—see the scar?—a-slicin' bread in that boardin' house, the missis put me out 'cause I couldn't do my work."

"How mean!" exclaimed Laura.

"Ah! ye don't know about boardin' house missises. They ain't human," said Liz, confidently. "But Mr. Norman, he seen me goin' out with my verlise, and he knowed about my sore thumb. He slipped me five dollars out o' his pocket. But he was rich," sighed Liz, ecstatically. "He owned a bank."

"Owned a bank?" gasped Laura.

"Yep."

"And lived in a cheap boarding house?" for Laura knew that Liz could not have worked in a very aristocratic place.

"Well! he went to a bank every day," said the simple girl. "And if he warn't rich why should he have slipped me the five dollars?"

"True—very true," admitted Laura, much amused.

But she did not think it so funny that evening when, as the girls sat about a fire they had made in the open, singing and telling jokes, and Lizzie was washing up the supper dishes, a sudden shrill whoop arose from the cook-tent.

"Gee! what's that?" demanded the slangy Bobby.

"A mouse!" declared Nellie. "That funny girl must be just as much afraid of them as *I* am."

"I hope it's nothing worse than a mouse," Lil said, tremblingly.

Laura had sprung up on the instant and run to the cook tent. Liz had dropped a pile of plates, and some of them were broken. She had deposited herself stiffly in a campstool. Her body was quite stiffened and her eyes fairly bulged—and it was not easy for Liz Bean's eyes *to* bulge!

"What is the matter, Liz?" demanded Laura, seizing her by the shoulder.

"I seen him," gasped Liz.

"You have seen whom?"

"*Him.*"

"But that doesn't mean anything to me," declared Laura, shaking her. "Who *is* he?"

"The feller I was tellin' you about. That feller that give me the five dollars."

"*What?*"

"Yes, Ma'am!" uttered Liz, solemnly. "He was standin' right yonder—just at the edge of them woods. I took the cover off the stove and the fire flashed out and showed me his face—just as plain!"

"You've been dreaming," said Laura, slowly.

"Git out!" ejaculated Liz, with emphasis. "I never fell asleep yet washin' greasy dishes—no, Ma'am!"

"Well!"

"I know what it means," Liz said, solemnly. "Yes, I do."

"What *does* it mean?" demanded Laura, doubtful whether to laugh or be serious.

"He's dead," said the odd girl.

"Dead?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"But why should he appear to you, even if he

were dead?" demanded Laura, seeing that she must never let this superstition take root in the camp. "Do you suppose he's come to try to get his five dollars back?"

"My goodness to gracious!" said Liz. "No. The ha'nt of a man that owned a bank wouldn't come to bother a poor gal like me for money, would he?"

CHAPTER XII

THE "KLEPTOMANIANTIC" GHOST

THE other girls crowded around then and wanted to know what had happened. Laura pinched Liz and said:

"She dropped those plates. Guess we won't make her pay for the broken ones, girls. Go on, now. I'll finish helping Liz wipe them."

So the matter of the "ha'nt" did not become public property just then. In fact, Mother Wit talked so seriously to the maid-of-all-work that she hoped the "ha'nt" had been laid, before they sought their cots that night.

But in the morning there was a most surprising sequel to the incident. The larder had been robbed!

"It can't be," said Laura, who heard of the trouble first of all when she popped out of the sleeping tent. Lizzie Bean had awakened Mrs. Morse and that lady—bundled in a blanket-robe—had come to the cook-tent to see.

"I ain't never walked in my sleep yet—and

knowed it," stated Lizzie, with conviction. "And there's the things missin'——"

The remainder of the big ham, a strip of bacon, coffee, sugar, syrup, canned milk, and half a sack of flour were among the things which had disappeared.

While the three stood there, amazed, Bobby came. "Bet it was those boys," said she. "Playing a joke on us. They're over here somewhere."

The sun was just rising, and its early beams shone on the camp across the lake. Laura ran for the binoculars and examined the boys' camp. Both powerboats were there, and the five canoes. The boys were all disporting themselves in the water—Laura could count the six.

"If they did it," she said, "they got back to their camp very early."

"See this!" shrieked Bobby, suddenly.

She was pointing to the table, set as usual for breakfast. Pinned to the red and white checked table-cloth was a crisp ten dollar bill.

"Whoever robbed us paid for the goods," Mrs. Morse said, feebly.

"It was that ha'nt!" declared Liz.

At that the story of the man's face she had seen at the edge of the wood the evening before, came out. All the girls heard the story, and at once there was a great hullabaloo!

"A man on the island!" gasped Nellie. "I'm going home."

"Pooh!" said Bobby. "Liz says it's a ghost. A kleptomaniac ghost at that."

"He can't be a kleptomaniac, Bobby," said Laura, laughing, "or he wouldn't have left money for the goods."

"He's a kleptomani-*antic* ghost, then!" giggled Bobby.

"How ridiculous!" said Jess. "Whoever heard the like?"

"The fact remains," said her mother, "that some stranger has been here while we slept, and taken the provisions—and we shall have to get more."

"The ten dollars will more than pay for what's missing," said Laura, slowly.

"What of that?" demanded Nellie. "I don't like the idea."

Lizzie was somewhat flurried. "And me—I was sleepin' right behind that canvas curtain. Not again! never! I'm goin' back to town."

At this the girls all set up a wail. "Oh, Liz! you mustn't! You promised to stay! We're paying you good wages, Liz! Don't leave us to do all the work!" was the chorus of objections.

"Well! I ain't goin' to stay right here where that ha'nt can get me," declared Liz.

"But," put forth Laura, seriously, though her eyes twinkled, "you shouldn't be afraid of *that* haunt if he was such a nice young man as you say he was."

"Huh!" grumbled Lizzie Bean, practically. "No young man is nice after he's dead."

There seemed to be no answer to this statement. But Mrs. Morse came to the rescue.

"You can bring your cot into the cabin, Lizzie," she said. "You will not be afraid if you sleep there with me, will you?"

"No, Ma'am. I reckon not," admitted the girl.

"But how about *us?*" cried Lil Pendleton. "Surely, we won't stay here if there are men on the island?"

"It's big enough for them and us, too, I guess," said Bobby, doubtfully.

"Maybe the man—or men—who stole our food, is no longer on the island," Laura said, slowly.

"And they paid for it!" exclaimed Dora.

"Money isn't everything," said Nellie.

"What *is?*" demanded Bobby.

"Our peace of mind," declared the doctor's daughter, "is more important. I shall be afraid to stay here if there are strange men on the island."

"We'll settle that," Laura declared, with vigor, "and at once."

"How?" demanded Dorothy, wonderingly.

"Search the island," said practical Mother Wit. "Certainly not by sitting down and sucking our thumbs."

"Oh, Laura!" wailed Lil. "I wouldn't dare!"

"Wouldn't dare what?" was Laura's rejoinder.

"Hunt for those men on this island. Why! we don't *want* to find them."

"And I'd like to know why not? I don't care if they *did* leave money for the food they took——"

"But there must be something bad about them——"

"How do we know that, Lil?" asked Laura. "There is, rather, something *good* about them, or they would not have left the money for the stolen food."

"Dear Laura is right—as she almost always is," said Mrs. Morse, fondly. "A real thief at heart would not have left that ten dollar bill."

"An' I'm tellin' you that chap was the nicest one that lived at Missis Brayton's boardin' house," put in Liz, reflectively.

"What chap?" cried Jess.

"The ha'nt," said Liz, simply.

"Oh, dear me, Lizzie!" said Laura, in some disgust. "Don't keep that up."

"Well, then! If it wasn't his ha'nt, it was *himself*. Guess I know him," declared the girl-of-all-work.

"Tell *me* about it, please?" said Jess' mother. "You girls run and get your baths and we'll get breakfast."

"I—I don't want to leave the tent if there are thieves about," complained Lil, to whom the water looked just as cold on this morning as it had the day before. "I—I've got some jewelry in my bag."

"Very foolish," said Bobby, bluntly. "We told you not to bring anything to camp that you cared about."

"Gently! gently!" said Laura, the peacemaker. "Come on, Lil. Don't be afraid of either the keptomaniantic thief, as Bobby calls him, or the cold water—neither will hurt you, I guess."

They had their plunge and that—or something else—stirred Mother Wit's "thinking machine." She said, as they trooped up to dress:

"We'll wig-wag the boys and bring them over. They will help us search the island. Besides, we shall need one of the powerboats to go for more food. It seems funny that a man who was will-

ing to pay for what he took—and pay so well—did not go down to Elberon Crossing and buy at the store just what he took from us."

"He's an outlaw—a murderer, maybe, fleeing for his life," suggested Lil, tremblingly.

"Pooh! so are you!" scoffed Jess. "More than likely he is some lazy fisherman who did not want to go to the store—some rich fellow from the city."

"If Liz knows what she is talking about," said Laura, "it *is* a rich fellow from Albany. A Mr. Norman. And she told me last night that he was a great fisherman and hunter.

"But what under the sun," demanded Bobby, "should he take our food for?"

"You can't tell me it is anything as simple as that," Lil Pendleton declared. "He is a thief, just the same. And it is dangerous for us to be on this island with him. Why! I wouldn't stay another night—unless the boys were here to defend us."

"Ah! the cat is out of the bag," chuckled Bobby. "Lil wants Purt over here with his revolver," and then the other girls laughed and Lil got mad again.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SEARCH OF THE ISLAND

Laura dressed in a hurry and ran out with the flags. She took a slip of paper with her on which Chet had marked down the code, to refresh her memory, and at once stood out upon a high boulder and began to wave the "call flag."

Without the glasses she could not see what the boys were doing about their camp; but Jess came with the best pair of binoculars, and soon told her that the boys were evidently in much excitement. Chet appeared with *his* flags, and brother and sister carried on a silent conversation for some ten minutes.

"No, girls," Laura said, seriously, when she came down from the rock and led the way to the breakfast table. "Chet assures me none of the boys have been over here. They were coming right after breakfast, anyway, and will come in the powerboats.

"They know nothing about our loss, and Chet is impressed with the seriousness of the affair. I wouldn't let him think we were scared at all, but

asked to borrow a boat so as to get more provisions."

"No! I should say not!" exclaimed Jess. "After what they said about our calling them, when they left us the other night, we don't want to give then a chance to laugh at us."

"Who'll go for the provisions to this Crossing you speak of?" asked Nellie.

"Oh, a couple of the boys. The others will help us search the island," Laura said, cheerfully.

"Make out a list of what is needed, Laura," advised Mrs. Morse, as she retired to her typewriter. "And be sure to get a bottle of peroxide. It's good for cuts, or mosquito bites, or any poison."

Not long after breakfast the two powerboats, the *Duchess* and the *Bonnie Lass,* were seen approaching. All the boys had come, and they were all very curious as to the raid that had been made upon the girls' pantry.

Purt Sweet had seemingly been transformed in the two days he had been "roughing it" in camp. He still wore the green knickerbockers, and the long stockings. The belt with its hunting-knife scabbard, was about his waist. And there was a suspicious bunch under his waistband that announced the presence of the ancient revolver.

However, Purt's mother would not have known

his clothing, so stained, torn and bedraggled did his garments appear. The boys had made him do his share of the camp work. Chopping wood had made his palms blister, sparks had snapped out of the fires he had made and burned holes in his clothes, and hot fat snapping from the skillet had left red marks on his hands and face.

Having fun in camp was the hardest work Purt Sweet had ever done; but he was ashamed to "kick" about it before the girls. He came ashore to assure Lil Pendleton that he would do his best to find and punish the marauders who had raided the camp on the island.

"Whether the fellow paid for what he got, or not," Chet said, seriously, when he had heard the particulars, "we want to know if he is still here, and what he means by such actions."

"We must know that he *isn't* here, or I sha'n't want to stay," declared Nellie Agnew, who was really very timid.

"Leave it to us," said Billy Long, grandly. "We'll comb this island with a fine tooth comb——"

"You don't suppose we girls are going to let you fellows do it all, do you?" demanded Laura. "Of course we shall help, Short and Long."

"Aw! you'll tear your frocks and scratch yourself on the vines, and stub your toes and fall

down, and make a mess generally," declared Short and Long, loftily. "Better stay here in camp and do your squealing."

"Well! I like that!" quoth Jess, making a dive for the short boy. She was considerably bigger than he, and catching him from the rear she wound her long arms about him and so held him tight.

"Take that back, Short and Long," she commanded, "or I shall hold you prisoner."

Short and Long found he could not get away from Jess, and finally stopped struggling. "I didn't know you thought so much of me, Jess," he said, grinning. "But it embarrasses me, dreadfully, to have you hug me in public."

"Why!" laughed the big girl, "I'd think no more of hugging you, than I would your brother, Tommy—and *he's* a dear!"

"You'd think so if you had that kid around all the time," grunted Short and Long, as Jess finally allowed him to wriggle loose. "I think he's more of a terror than he is a dear."

"He takes it from you, then," laughed Bobby.

"Yep," said Lance, grinning, "it runs in Billy's family to be a cut-up—like wooden legs!"

"What's Tommy been doing now?" asked Dorothy Lockwood.

"Why, he is great chums with the kid next

door, and they got into mischief of some kind the other day. The other kid's mother told them that if they did such things 'the bad man would get them.' 'Who's the bad man, Tommy?' our Sue asked him, and Tommy says:

"'Don't know. You'll hafter ask Charlie's mother. She's well acquainted with him.'"

"Come on, now!" exclaimed Lance. "Who's going to take the *Duchess* and go to Elberon Crossing for this bill of goods? We can't all go hunting for robbers."

"I shall stay here to help defend the girls, doncher know," stated Purt, swaggering about the camp. "But any of you fellows can take my boat."

"Spoken like a nobleman, Purt!" declared Chet, laughing. "Come on, now! Let's arrange how we shall sweep the island, from shore to shore."

But first it was agreed that Lance and Reddy should go with the *Duchess* for the new supply of food for the girls. They set off at once.

The island was a quarter of a mile across at its widest point. Even if the whole party entered on the search they would have difficulty in making so strong a human barrier across the isle that a fugitive in the covert could not escape through the line.

But Chet occasionally had a bright idea as well as his sister. He sent Short and Long—who could climb like a squirrel—to the top of a tall tree on the knoll. From that height he could see every opening in the wood, to the upper point of the island—which was nearly two miles long.

"Now we'll all go and beat up the brush and see if we can start anything bigger than a rabbit," Chet declared. "Spread out and try to push through the woods as straight as possible."

"We girls, too?" cried Nellie.

"Be a sport, Nell, and come along," urged Jess Morse. "We'll be in sight and call of each other all the time."

Which was true enough, as they soon discovered. Lil said it was her turn to help do the camp work. And of course neither Mrs. Morse nor Liz could go.

"Don't you think," Purt asked, seriously, "that one of us ought to remain here and defend—er—the camp?"

"Sure," said Chet, quickly. "We'll leave Art, if you say so. He rather admires Lil, too, Purt."

This made the dude keep still; but he *did* dislike this "manhunt" in the thick brush of Acorn Island.

After they had gone half a mile or so, and found nothing—not even a trace of anybody else

having camped on the island—they all took the situation more cheerfully. They believed whoever had stolen the girls' food had already departed.

"Some of these fancy city fishermen, like enough," Chet declared, when they all came together at the western point of the island. "See yonder! there are two men in a boat, fishing, now."

"If they were the robbers they would not boldly anchor off there," his sister said.

"True enough, Laura," said Bobby. "I believe that whoever stole from us, is far away now. And everybody who comes to the lake knows that it is forbidden to camp on Acorn Island. The guides all know it."

"How about what Liz says about the man she saw last evening?" demanded Jess. "She says he was a man she knew in Albany."

"She had been talking to me about him," laughed Laura, "and I guess he was in her mind. Why should such a man come and rob our camp?"

"Well! it's a mystery," Chet said. "But I reckon you'll not be bothered again; the island seems empty save for ourselves."

But later they thought that they might have been a little more careful in searching the upper end of Acorn Island.

CHAPTER XIV

"MORE FUN THAN A LITTLE"

THE girls were tired enough when they got back from the search; and it being an hour before dinner, Mrs. Morse advised them all to retire to the sleeping tent and lie down.

However, it was too sultry for that, and they chose to put on bathing suits and take a second dip to cool off. The boys had their bathing suits, too, and the party had twenty minutes of fun in the lake, with Mrs. Morse sitting on a rock in the shade and enjoying the pranks.

Lil's bathing suit was very resplendent, and so was Purt's. They were so much better dressed than anybody else that Bobby declared she was ashamed to be seen in their company—so she dove under the water.

The cut-up had the power of remaining beneath the surface a long time, and she crawled on the bottom to where Lil and Purt stood, waist deep in the water, without being observed.

Suddenly Purt yelled, dropped Lil's hand, and

grabbed at the calf of his right leg. "A crab's got me!" he bawled.

"A crab in fresh water?" jeered Billy Long. "That's a new one!"

"It's one of those horrid snapping turtles!" shrieked Lil, and started for the shore. Not quickly enough, however, to escape Bobby's thumb and finger.

"It's that horrid Bobby Hargrew!" gasped Lil, seeing the black-eyed one shoot up from beneath, and take a long breath.

"Aw, Miss Hargrew!" begged Purt. "Don't bother us so. It's weally too bad of you."

"Then act human!" ejaculated Bobby. "Don't you two stand around as though you were fashion pictures in the magazines. Duck under and get your hair wet! You'll both get a sunstroke," and in passing them she managed to tip Lil right over backward—and that beautiful bathing suit never *did* look as well after it was all wet!

They had dinner before Lance and Reddy returned from their errand. It had already been agreed that the boys should stay all day at Acorn Island and not return to their own camp until after supper.

Occasionally one of them took a squint at the camp across the lake through a pair of glasses.

But nothing disturbed *that* spot. Their tents were erected in a clearing at the edge of the water, and they knew there was not a human habitation on that side of the lake within five miles.

Elberon Crossing was at the head of Rocky River, but a good half mile from the water and landing, where a "tote-road" went through the Big Woods to the lumber camps farther west.

The *Duchess* was in sight of the girls' camp all the way from the landing on the south side of the river. On her return the party watched her approach, which was soon after the noonday meal.

"Hello!" ejaculated Chet, suddenly grabbing up the glasses. "They have a passenger."

"Who have?" queried Billy Long.

"Lance and Reddy. Crickey! who have we here?" and then Chet began to laugh uproariously.

He tossed the glasses to Short and Long. The latter looked at the motorboat for a moment, and then began to laugh, too. Some of the girls became interested, and they ran for their glasses.

There was a third moving figure in the boat. It sat up forward and seemed to be gazing on the island eagerly. The girls began to giggle as well as Short and Long.

"Hush!" begged Laura. "Don't say a word."

Purt and Lil were sitting together in the shade,

and paid no attention to what was going on. Almost everybody on the island but themselves realized the identity of the third figure in the *Duchess* before the boat neared the beach.

Suddenly Purt gasped, and sat up straighter. He glanced all about and a sort of hunted expression came into his face.

"What's the matter, Mr. Sweet?" demanded Lil, in surprise.

"I—I thought I heard—Yes! I knew I could not be mistaken," said Purt, in horror.

"What *is* the matter?" demanded his companion, with some tartness. She did not like mysteries.

"I—I heard a dog bark," stammered Purt.

"Well! what if you did?"

"But on this—this island. Who—who could have brought the howwid cweature here?"

"Not *that* dog, Purt!" gasped Lil, suddenly remembering.

There was a hail from the crew of the *Duchess*. Again the sharp bark of a dog sounded.

Purt leaped to his feet. He glared down upon the approaching motorboat. Then he glanced around helplessly, as though tempted to run.

The Barnacle was fixed on his tail in the bow of the approaching boat, barking for all he was worth!

"Hi, Purt!" yelled Lance, standing up in the cockpit of the *Duchess* and bawling the news. "Here's your canine friend!"

Purt fairly groaned. Then he got mad and forgetting the girls were present, he blackguarded the jokers in the launch wrathfully.

"Oh, hush-aby! hush-aby, sonny!" begged Bobby. "You wouldn't do all that to Lance and poor little Reddy—would you really?"

"I'll get square with them!" stammered the dude, "and I'll kill that dog."

"Don't you bite him," warned Short and Long, "for if you do right now he will sure have the hydrophobia. Take it easy, Purt—cool and easy."

But the dude could not. The very sight of that laughing, ragged-coated dog made his blood boil. He hunted a club with which to meet the brute when he landed.

But Lance explained about the Barnacle before the *Duchess* came close enough for them to land.

"Why, there he was ready to meet us at the Elberon store," laughed Lance. "I found out that everybody along the Big Woods trails knows the mongrel. He had come up yesterday with a tote-team which was going into the woods.

"He welcomed Reddy and me as if we were his long-lost brothers. But it's Purt he wants to see —believe me!"

"I'll fix him!" threatened the dude, from the shore, and waving a club.

"Hold on!" begged Lance. "I have a better idea than that. I didn't bring the Barnacle along to be slaughtered to make a Sweet holiday—no, sir! What do you think about leaving him at the island here with the girls, Chet?"

"Great! he'll guard the camp," declared Laura's brother. "Nobody else will come around to steal grub."

"That's a good idee, Mister," said Liz, from the cook-tent. "The dog is wuth more than any boy to watch for us."

"Hear that, will you?" demanded Chet. "You girls have one fine suffragette in this Lonesome Liz, as Billy calls her."

"She's ripe for battle, when it comes to pitting the ladies against the mere male," laughed Laura. "We have found *that* out."

Against Purt's objections the Barnacle was allowed to come ashore. And the poor beast *did* seem so delighted to be among them again that they had not the heart to treat him badly. At least, nobody hated him save Lily and Purt.

Barnacle was fed hugely by Liz Bean, and had to lie down after it and sleep. So he did not disturb Purt during the afternoon.

The girls had agreed to get supper all by them-

selves. Liz and Mrs. Morse were to have nothing to do with it.

Bobby and Laura made cake. There were chickens to roast—two pairs of them—that Lance had thoughtfully bought of a woman at the Crossing. These were handed over to the tender mercies of Jess and Nell.

Now, Jess was a good cook; she did most of the housework at the Morse cottage. But when they had had chicken, the butcher always cleaned the creature before sending it home.

"My goodness!" sniffed Nell. "What do you know about taking a chicken apart?"

"Not—not much, I am afraid," admitted Jess. "And here are four of them! Well, we ought to learn a good deal about it by the time we have butchered all four."

"Ugh! I don't want to cut into them. And some of their insides are the delicacies of the chicken, while other parts are no good. Do you know one from the other, Jess?"

"I reckon I know the giblets—if I can once get at them," said Jess.

"Mother and I took our sewing machine to pieces once, and fixed it," Nellie said, "and that was pretty complicated. But we had a book of instructions——"

"They don't issue a book of instructions with

a roasting chicken," Jess chuckled. "It's up to us, I expect——"

Then she called Lance. They had to admit a boy *was* good for something once in a while. Lance knew all about cleaning and drawing chickens, and he did *that* part of the work very neatly and with dispatch.

It being such warm weather the girls made dressing enough to stuff only two of the chickens. They got on bravely with their share of the work and were ready to put the chickens in the oven in the big dripping-pan when Laura's and Bobby's cakes were done.

Meanwhile Reddy and Short and Long had been very busy with the ice-cream freezer. The boys had brought over a can of milk and a big block of ice from the landing and Mrs. Morse had made the ice-cream. The boys froze it and packed it down in the shade.

Everybody began to get hungry early, for the odors from the cook-tent had been most delicious. As soon as the chickens and the baked potatoes were done, supper was served. Liz, in a clean dress and a clean apron served it.

Everything was fine except the chicken stuffing. There was something just a little queer about *that;* but what it was nobody seemed able to tell.

"I know I seasoned it with that same prepared seasoning of herbs that we use at home," wailed Jess.

"You must have left something out," said Nellie, despairingly.

Chet was tasting the dressing critically. "No," he said, without a smile. "I don't think you could have done *that*."

Jess brightened visibly. "Then it doesn't taste so bad?" she said, hopefully.

"There's nothing you could have left *out*, Jess, that would make it taste like this. It's something you've put in——"

Liz suddenly presented herself at the table shaking a box in her hand. "Was *this* what you took for seasonin' for that stuffin'?" she demanded, solemnly.

"Why—yes," admitted Jess. "That's the very box I always buy it in at our grocer's."

"Yep," said Liz. "It comes in that. But that's an old box I've had a long time, and there was lic'rish powder in it. I guess 'twon't hurt none o' yer; but I wouldn't eat much o' that stuffin'."

"Goodness!" murmured Jess, as the laughter broke out. "I *thought* that stuff smelt kind of funny when I shook it out of the can."

CHAPTER XV

THE BARNACLE HAS A NOSE

Aside from that single mistake the meal was declared to be a great success. The cake turned out a joy, and when it and the heaping dishes of ice-cream were brought on, the boys stood up and gave three cheers for the girls of Acorn Island Camp.

"But hold on!" exclaimed Chet, suddenly investigating his share of the ice-cream with a spoon. "I have been given a premium with my supply. Here! who has lost a perfectly good fly?"

"Alive?" demanded his chum, Lance.

"He can still crawl," admitted Chet.

"That fly's a perfect idiot," declared Lance, warmly. "It's the same one that was in the hot gravy a little while ago. I hope he takes a chill. What does he think this is—a turkish bath?"

They lingered long at the table, until finally Liz (who had agreed to "clean up") drove them all out of the tent. They finished the ice-cream

(which Reddy and Short and Long declared *had* to be eaten up because there was not ice enough to keep it out in the open), with the light fading out of the western sky and the early fireflies flitting about the edge of the wood.

The Barnacle began to bark vociferously, all of a sudden. Lizzie, up at the lighted cook-tent, squealed.

Up rose the boys with a great whoop. "Go for it!" yelled Lance. "Sick 'im!" which seems to be the approved way to set a dog on anything living.

Barnacle was barking his foolish head off. He dashed across from the cook-tent to the woods, and then back again. The boys all urged him on. The girls ran together in a frightened group, Lil moaning:

"Oh, he's here again! that dreadful man is here again!"

"Hush you!" commanded Liz, in disgust. "'Tain't no man. 'Tain't even a ha'nt. I seen it. It's a black and white kitten——"

"Oh, Chet! call him off! call him off!" begged Laura.

"Quick, Chet!" added Jess. "Don't let that horrid dog hurt that kitty."

"Chetwood!" shrieked Laura again, knowing more about the inhabitants of the woods than

her chum. "Chetwood! Stop it! Come back! *That's a polecat!*"

"*What?*" gasped all the girls, and then Bobby began to shriek with laughter. It was too, too funny—with Jess begging the boys not to let the Barnacle hurt "kitty."

It was impossible, however, to call the dog off the trail. That camp scavenger, the American skunk, is the mildest mannered little creature in the world—providing he is left strictly alone. Being timid and otherwise defenseless, God has given him a scent-sack which——

"Nobody can tell me that the skunk only brought a *cent* into the Ark," declared the exhausted Bobby. "That fellow has a dollar's worth himself!"

"Why—why did the Creator ever *make* such a horrid beast?" demanded Lil.

"You ask that and wear those furs of yours in the winter?" said Nellie, laughing. "The pretty little fellow that the Barnacle has so unwisely chased away from our vicinity is becoming very valuable to the furriers. There are people who raise the creatures for the market——"

"Excuse *me!*" gasped Bobby. "I'd want a chronic cold in the head, if I had to work on a skunk farm."

As Barnacle and his quarry went farther from

the camp the odor that had risen drifted away, too; but for two days thereafter the girls could easily tell in which part of the island Barnacle was running game, by the way in which the odor came "down wind" to them.

Liz fed him at the edge of the wood; the girls chased him from the vicinity of the tents whenever he appeared.

The Barnacle did not mind much; for he had struck a dog-hunter's paradise. He was a fiend after small game and there had not been a dog on Acorn Island for some years, in all probability.

He was running and yapping all day and pretty nearly all night. How many groundhogs, chipmunks, muskrats, coons, and other small animals, besides the rabbits, he chased and caught there was no telling. Perhaps he did not kill one.

But he barked to his heart's desire and when he finally had driven everything to cover, he came back to the tents, purified in soul as well as in odor, and was willing to sleep during the day and sit up on his haunches at night (when they tied him to the corner of the cabin) and try to howl his head off at the moon.

The girls—even Lil and Nellie—lost their fear of a second visit from the mysterious "kleptomaniantic." Nobody would land upon the island to disturb them while that crazy dog was about.

So they fished, and swam, and picked berries, and hunted flowers and herbs, and went out sailing with the boys in the powerboats, and drove their canoes up and down the lake, having a fine time every hour of the day.

Mrs. Morse got on famously with her book, and allowed the girls to do about as they liked. They got into no mischief, however; but they all grew brown, and strong, and even Lily began to put on flesh.

At this season there were few fishermen at Lake Dunkirk. Some days there were long processions of barges sailing past the island, making for Rocky River and the ports down stream. And sometimes puffy tugs drew other barges westward, against the current.

None of the crews of these boats disturbed the campers. Acorn Island had been placarded for years, and it had always been necessary to get a permit to have even a picnic there.

Just one couple of fishermen came within range of the girls' vision that first week or ten days. And that couple, in their clumsy canoe, were never near enough for the girls of Central High to see their faces.

"I wonder where *they* camp at night?" said Laura thoughtfully one evening as she and Jess were paddling in for supper, being the last of the

scattered girls to make camp. She had sighted the strange fishermen off the western end of Acorn Island again.

"Bet they are the fellows who took our food!" exclaimed Jess, suddenly.

"And have hung about here all this time? Nonsense!" returned Laura. "But don't let Lil and Nellie hear you say that."

"All right. But I bet they are."

"I'm more worried by that cloud yonder," said Laura. "We're going to have a tempest."

"Hope not till supper's over," said the hungry Jess.

"We'll peg down the tents to make sure as soon as we get in," said the careful Laura.

They did so. Half through supper the first drops of the storm fell. Then the thunder rolled nearer and a tall tree was riven on the mainland, within sight of Camp Acorn.

That pretty well settled the supper for most of the girls. Even the bravest had never experienced a thunder storm under canvas before.

So they all ran into Mrs. Morse's cabin. It did not seem so bad there.

In the midst of the downpour, however, and in a lull between thunder claps, Barnacle, who had been tied to the corner of the hut and had crawled under the floor for protection, suddenly broke out

with a terrific salvo of barks. He rushed out into the rain and leaped at the end of his rope, barking and yelping.

"Somebody's about the camp," murmured Mrs. Morse. "The dog's nose—if not his eyes—tells him so.

"It's Liz," ventured Jess, for the maid-of-all-work had not come with them to the cabin.

Laura threw the door open, in spite of the flashing lightning. Lil shrieked and even some of the other girls cowered as the lightning played across the sky. But before the thunder burst forth again, Laura heard another sound—and it was not the Barnacle baying.

Lizzie Bean, in the cook-tent, was screaming in a queer and stifled way.

CHAPTER XVI

WHERE THE BARNACLE'S NOSE LED HIM

THE rain descended in torrents before the cabin door. E'er Laura could plunge into it, Jess dragged her back and slammed the door.

"Don't be a goose, Laura!" she cried.

"She—she——Something is the matter with Liz," declared Laura.

"Of course not!"

"I tell you, I heard her. And there's the dog barking again."

"You can't go through that rain——"

"I will!" declared Laura, and she wrenched open the door once more. Jess could not hold her. Mother Wit plunged out into the storm.

Never having deserted her chum but once—and then involuntarily at a certain occasion long ago—Jess was not going to be behind now. She dove likewise into the storm.

The rain beat upon the two girls in a fashion to almost take their breath away. Never had they been so beaten by the elements.

They staggered, almost fell, clung together,

and then bent their heads to the downpour and pressed on. The flickering lantern still illuminated the cook-tent. The awning was dropped and the canvas heaved and slatted against the poles.

The rain made so much noise that they did not hear Liz now. Or else, she had ceased crying out. Laura and Jess pressed forward and—it being but a few yards, after all, to the tent—they burst into the kitchen in a moment more.

"Liz! Liz!" gasped Laura, almost breathless.

There was a noise behind the fluttering canvas partition. Was it the girl in the sleeping part of the tent?

"Oh! somebody's there!" muttered Jess, clinging to her chum's hand.

Laura sprang forward and jerked apart the flap. She only feared that something was the matter with Liz.

And there was, apparently. She was crouching down, against the far wall of the tent, her hands over her face, and trembling like a leaf.

Afterward Laura thought over this scene with wonder. Lonesome Liz did not seem like a girl who would be so terribly disturbed about a thunder storm. She had shown no fear when the tempest began and the other girls had scampered for the cabin.

But now she was moaning, and rocking herself to and fro, and it was some moments before they could get a sensible word out of her.

"Oh! oh! oh!" wailed Liz. "I want to go back to town. I don't like this place a little bit—no, I don't! Oh, oh!"

"Stop your noise, Liz!" exclaimed Jess, suddenly exasperated. "You can't go back while it is storming so. And when it stops you won't want to."

But Laura was worried. She looked all about the tent. What had the Barnacle barked so about?

Nor was he satisfied now. The storm held up after a time; but the dog kept rushing out and barking as though he had just remembered that there had been a prowler about, and he had not had a chance to chase him.

Laura understood that rain, or wet, killed the scent for dogs and like trailing animals. This that had disturbed the Barnacle must have been a person who had come very close.

They took Liz to the cabin, and left her there after the storm was over and the six Central High girls went to their own tent. But although Laura did not say much about it, she was as dissatisfied as the dog seemed to be.

In the morning she was up earlier than anybody else in the camp. The grass and brush was

drenched with the rain. There were puddles here and there. The sun was not yet up and it would take several hours of his best work to dry up the wet places.

Laura had not won her nickname of "Mother Wit" for nothing. She had inventiveness; likewise she had a sane and sensible way of looking at almost any mysterious happening. She did not get scared as Nellie did, or ignore a surprising thing, as Jess did.

Now she was dissatisfied with the outcome of Liz Bean's "conniption," as Bobby had termed it the evening before. The maid-of-all-work had shown no fear of thunder and lightning when the tempest began and the other girls were frightened.

Then, why should she wait until the storm was nearly over before showing all the marks of extreme terror? And, in addition, Liz seemed to be fairly speechless about the matter, whereas she was naturally an extremely garrulous person.

"Why did the Barnacle bark so?" demanded Laura, when she stood, shivering, in the gray light of dawn before the cook-tent. "Not just for the fun of hearing his own voice, I am sure."

The ground before the cook-tent was soft, and trampled by the girls' own feet. Laura went carefully around to the rear, stepping on firm ground so as to leave no marks.

There was a rear opening to the cook-tent—out of the part Liz had been sleeping in. But these flaps were laced down.

However, there were marks in the soft ground right here—footmarks that could not be mistaken. They were prints of a man's boot—no girl in the crowd wore such footgear as those that made these marks!

The boot-prints led right from the laced flaps of the tent toward the woods. Laura could see fully a dozen of the marks, all headed that way. The man had come from the inside of the tent, for there were no footprints showing an approach to the tent from this end.

"I knew that girl did not cry because of the thunder and lightning," was Laura's decision. "This man burst into the tent while she was alone. And for some reason she is afraid to tell us the truth about him.

"Of course, she hasn't really told a falsehood. She just let us believe that it was the storm that had scared her.

"Now, who is the man? Is she sheltering him because of fear, or for another reason?

"And what did he want? Why did he come to the tent in the storm? For shelter from the rain? Not probable. I declare!" thought Mother Wit, "this is as puzzling a thing as ever I heard."

She said nothing to anybody before breakfast about her discoveries. She did not wish to disturb Mrs. Morse, for that lady had come into the woods for a rest from her social duties, and for the writing of a book. Why should she be troubled by a mere mystery?

The detective fever burned hotly in Laura Belding's veins on this morning. From Jess she could not keep her discovery for long; but she swore her chum to silence.

Then she took Bobby Hargrew into her confidence. Despite the younger girl's recklessness, she was brave and physically strong.

"We're going to run down Lizzie's 'ha'nt,' if the Barnacle has a nose," declared Laura, after the trio had discussed the pros and cons of the affair.

So they loosened the dog, Laura holding him in leash, and slipped away to the woods when none of the other members of the party were watching. Laura knew that the scent would not lie very strong after the pelting rain; but they could follow the trail by sight for a long distance.

It led straight toward the far end of Acorn Island—the end which they and the boys, had so carelessly searched the day after the larder had been robbed. Here and there they came upon the print of the unknown man's boots in the softened soil.

"Gee, Laura!" gasped Bobby. "Suppose he turns on us? We don't know whether he is a robber or a minister. What will we do when we find him?"

"That depends altogether upon what he looks like," said Laura. "Now hush, Bobby. The Barnacle is pulling hard; he really smells something."

"I hope it isn't another black and white kitten," chuckled Bobby.

They went down a slope to a small hollow, well sheltered by trees and rocks. There was a faint odor of wood smoke in the air.

"A camp," whispered Jess, having hard work to keep her teeth from nervously chattering, despite the heat of the day. "Who do you suppose is here?"

"We'll see," whispered Laura in return, and slipped the dog's leash.

The Barnacle ran down into the dale at once. The three girls followed, cautiously parting the branches. They came in sight of the fire.

It was the remains of a late breakfast-fire, without doubt. There was a single figure sitting at one side of the smoldering wood. Barnacle was running about the encampment, snuffing eagerly for broken bits. He paid the figure by the fire no attention, nor did the man look at the dog.

THERE WAS NO MISTAKING HIM FOR ANYBODY BUT PROFESSOR DIMP.

The man stooped, and his face was buried in his hands. He wore a shabby frock coat, and a disreputable hat.

"That's one of those two fishermen we saw in the canoe," whispered Jess.

"Wonder if you're right?" breathed Bobby.

Just then the man raised his head and turned so that the three girls from Central High could see his face. It was unshaven and the man looked altogether like a tramp. But there was no mistaking him for anybody but Professor Dimp, the Latin and history instructor of Central High!

CHAPTER XVII

A PERFECTLY UNSATISFACTORY INTERVIEW

"GOODNESS GRACIOUS!" gasped Bobby, the first to find her breath. She fell limply against Laura and Jess. "What do you know about *that?* Say, girls! Do you see the same thing I do, or am I going crazy?"

"Hush!" commanded Jess, hoarsely.

"Don't be ridiculous, child," advised Laura, rather sharply. "He will hear you——"

"Will that be a crime?" demanded Bobby, still in a whisper.

"It may be," said Laura, slowly. "We don't know why the professor is here."

"To commune with nature, I judge," said Jess, drily.

"I can't imagine Old Dimple communing with nature—not as a pastime," giggled Bobby.

"He surely has some good reason for being here," Laura murmured.

"We won't accuse him of robbing the camp that time, I suppose?" asked Jess. "Or being up there last evening in the storm?"

"That trail came this way," declared Bobby, suddenly forgetting to laugh.

"Barnacle's nose might have deceived him," said Laura.

"I haven't faith in much of that dog *but* his nose," declared Jess. "He showed particular intelligence in following the trail down here. Why should we suddenly suspect him of being foolish, just because we found what we didn't expect."

"Clear as mud!" exclaimed Bobby. "'Didn't expect' is good, however. If you had asked me a minute before we saw him, who was the most unexpected person to find at the end of our walk, I should have said Old Dimple."

"Why!" gasped Jess, "it *couldn't* be Professor Dimp."

"You mean he couldn't have been the kleptomaniantic thief?" chuckled Bobby.

Laura began to laugh softly herself. "Nor could he have been the person we—and the Barnacle—have been trailing," she said, suddenly.

"Why not?" demanded Jess and Bobby together.

"Did you ever notice Professor Dimp's feet?" asked Mother Wit.

"Horrors! No. Never saw him barefooted," said Bobby.

"Miss Smartie! His shoes, then?" proceeded the unruffled Laura.

"I—I——Why, no," admitted Bobby.

"Look at them now. He's not a big man, but he has plentiful understandings," chuckled Laura. "See?"

"Plain!" exclaimed Jess, peering through the branches.

"And those footprints we followed were of a person who wears a narrow, small boot. Small for a man, I mean. I don't believe the old Prof. ever *could* get into such shoes."

"Hurrah for Mother Wit—the lady detective!" cheered Bobby, under her breath.

"I am going to ask him——"

"What?" demanded Jess, half frightened as Laura started to press through the fringe of bushes.

"If he knows anything about that young man."

"What young man?" demanded the startled Jess.

"The young man who scared Liz last evening in the storm. The same young man who took the things from our camp—and left the ten dollar bill."

"The kleptomaniantic!" breathed Bobby, tagging close behind.

"Then it's the man who has been fishing with the professor?" gasped Jess.

"You've guessed it," said Laura. "They are

together. This is a camp for two. You can see the fish-heads lying about. There are two tin-plates and two empty cups."

"Are you sure the—the old Prof was one of those fishermen we saw in the boat?" asked Bobby.

"I recognize that old coat and hat," said Laura, firmly. "I do not see why I did not recognize Professor Dimp, in spite of his disguise, before."

"Well!" sighed Jess. "I am thankful one of our fellow-inhabitants of the island is nobody worse than Professor Dimp."

"But *why?*" demanded Bobby, wonderingly.

"We'll find out what it means," said Laura, with more confidence than she really felt. Of course, she was not afraid of any physical violence. But the old professor was so terribly stern and strict that it took some courage to walk across the glade, where Barnacle was chewing fish-heads, and face the shabby old gentleman.

"What, what, what?" snapped Professor Dimp, rising up from the log on which he had been sitting. "Girls from Central High, eh? Ha! Miss Belding—yes; Miss Morse—yes; Miss Hargrew—yes. Well! what do you want?"

He seemed grayer than ever. His outing in the woods (if he had been here ever since school broke up) had done him little good, for he was

wrinkled and troubled looking. His thin lips actually trembled as he greeted the three girls in characteristic manner. His eyes, however, were as bright as ever—like steel points. He looked this way when the boys had been a trial to him in Latin class and he was about to say something very sharp.

"We are sorry to disturb you, Professor Dimp," said Laura, bravely. "But we are in a quandary."

"A quandary, Miss Belding?"

"Yes, sir. Our dog has been following a man who came to our camp last night and frightened us. The dog led us right here to this spot. Have you seen him?"

"Seen the dog?" demanded the old professor. "Do you think I am blind?"

"I mean the man," said Laura, humbly.

"What does he look like? Describe him," commanded the professor, without a change of expression.

Laura was balked right at the start. She had no idea what the young man looked like, whom she believed Liz Bean knew, and whom she believed had come to the camp at the other end of Acorn Island twice.

"I only know what his boots are like," she said, finally, and looking straight into the old professor's face.

"Well, Miss?"

"I think *you* can supply the rest of his description," said Mother Wit, firmly.

"What do you mean, Miss?" snapped the old professor.

"He wore narrow boots, and his footprints lead directly to this place," said Laura. "Surely you must have seen him."

"Why should I?" demanded the professor.

"Because you have had a companion here. Two men made this camp—have eaten more than one meal here. Where is your companion, sir?"

"Miss—Miss Belding!" exclaimed the professor in a tone of anger. "How dare you? What do you mean?"

"I don't mean to offend you, sir," said Mother Wit, while Jess tugged at her sleeve and even Bobby stepped back toward the fringe of brush. The old gentleman looked very terrible indeed.

"I don't mean to offend you, sir," repeated Laura. "But that man has been twice to our camp. He has disturbed us. He was there again last night and frightened our little maid-of-all-work almost out of her wits. We have got to know what it means."

"You are beside yourself, girl!" gasped the old gentleman, and instantly turned his head aside so that they could not see his face.

"Liz calls him 'Mr. Norman,'" Laura pursued. "If you do not tell me who he is, and what his visits to our camp mean, I shall find out more about him—*in Albany!*"

Professor Dimp did not favor them with another word. He walked away and left the trio of girls standing, amazed, in the empty camping place.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN EVENTFUL FISHING TRIP

Jess and Bobby were both disappointed and disturbed over the interview with Professor Dimp. Laura said so little about it that Jess was really suspicious.

"Can you see through it?" she demanded. "What do you think the Dimple means?"

"I haven't the least idea," said her chum, frankly.

But there was another thought which Laura Belding was not so frank about. She spoke of this to neither Jess nor Bobby.

They agreed, as they went back toward their camp, with Barnacle, that they would take nobody into their confidence about the professor being up here at Lake Dunkirk, fishing. Suspicious circumstances had attached themselves to the old gentleman's presence here; yet the girls could not believe that Professor Dimp had anything to do with the raid on their larder, or the frightening of Liz Bean the evening previous.

However, Laura took Liz aside when they arrived at the camp and endeavored to get the truth out of her.

"Liz," she said to the sad-faced girl, who seemed gloomier than ever on this morning, "who was the man who scared you in the rain last evening?"

The maid-of-all-work did not look startled. Perhaps she had nerved herself already for just this question.

She merely stared at Laura unblinkingly and asked. "What, Ma'am?"

"Don't pretend that you don't know what I mean, Liz," said Laura, impatiently. "I found the man's tracks and the Barnacle found his camp for us. The man came right into this tent last evening in all that storm, and you let him out at the back and laced down the flaps.

"Of course, there was no harm in it. And there may be no harm in the man himself, or his reason for being here on Acorn Island.

"But if the girls hear of it—all of them, I mean—they are going to be scared again, and it will break up our outing and spoil all our fun. Now! I want to know what it means, Liz."

"Don't mean nothin'," declared the girl, sullenly.

"Why, *that* is no answer," cried Laura.

"Then there ain't none," said Liz, shrugging her narrow shoulders, and she turned to her work again.

"You absolutely refuse to talk to me about him?" demanded Laura, rather vexed.

"I ain't got nothin' to say," muttered Lizzie Bean.

"Then I'll find out about him in some other way. It is that Mr. Norman you spoke about before—I am sure of *that*. And I shall write to Albany and learn why he is up here and what he is doing. Of one thing I am sure: he has no business on this island frightening the girls. The island is private property and is posted.

If Liz was at all frightened by this threat, she did not show it. And, to tell the truth, it was an empty threat. Laura Belding did not know whom to write to in the city. She did not know the address at which Liz had worked there, and at which the mysterious Mr. Norman had been a boarder.

Some of the boys came over that afternoon and arranged with the girls of Acorn Island Camp to go fishing up the lake the next day. There was a certain creek, which came in from the north side, that was supposed to be well stocked with perch and trout.

"Part of it is posted, I believe," said Chet. "Some old grouch owns a fishing right on the

stream. But we can keep off his territory. And we'll show you girls how to fish with a fly, and to use your reels."

"Teach us how to fish with mosquitoes—they're more plentiful than flies since the rain," Jess said, slapping at one which was just presenting his bill.

"Crackey!" exclaimed Billy Long. "You've got it good here. There are not many of the beasts on this island. But there's a swamp not far behind our camp, and it's a shame to call the things that come from that swamp, mosquitoes—they are more like flying tigers.!"

"I suppose the old sabre-toothed tiger, of our prehistoric days, was no more savage than these swamp fly-by-nights," Chet laughed.

"Don't you have any other visitors over yonder?" Laura asked.

"Oh, say! we had some this morning. Did you hear the hounds baying?"

"Hounds?"

"Real bloodhounds," said her brother. "Sheriff's posse——"

"Hush!" gasped Laura, clapping a hand over his mouth. "Haven't you any sense at all? Want to scare Lil and Nellie out of their next five years' growth?"

"Wow!" muttered Chet.

"Shut Billy off, too. And then come and tell me all about it," commanded Laura.

Chet grabbed Billy by the collar and dragged him away from the girls. Then, after whispering to the smaller boy, emphatically, for a minute, he let him go and rejoined his sister.

"Now, what do you want to know, Sis?" he demanded.

"All about it," said Laura, eagerly. "Is there really a sheriff's posse hunting him?"

"Who's who?" asked Chet, in much amazement.

"Why—whoever they are chasing," replied Laura, rather blankly.

"Just curiosity?" Chet wanted to know.

"You can call it that," responded the girl, smiling whimsically at him.

"You never were just idly curious in all your life," declared Chet, grinning at her. "Well! the men were after that fellow who stole from the Merchants and Miners Bank of Albany."

"Oh!"

"They got wind of his being up this way. Somebody saw him, or thought he did. Crackey! Do you suppose *he* was the fellow who took the food from your tent, Laura?"

"Yes, I do," admitted his sister.

"Then he's far enough away from the lake

now," said Chet, nodding. "That amount would have lasted him till he got over the Canadian border."

"Perhaps," said Laura. "At any rate, those dogs won't be able to follow his trail much after the hard rain of last night."

"Sure not," Chet rejoined. "That's what the sheriff said. He got us to promise to let him know at Creeper Station if we saw anybody who looked like Norman Halliday——"

"That's it!" gasped Laura, clapping her hands together.

"What's 'it?'" demanded her brother, wonderingly.

"His name."

"Of course it is. The fellow who stole the securities from the bank. They will get him of course."

"With bloodhounds? How terrible!"

"Not at all. They are muzzled. And friendly brutes, at that. They only follow the scent they are put on, and probably would do their quarry no harm, even if they were unmuzzled."

"Well, it seems terrible, just the same," murmured Laura. Then she added: "Suppose he was somebody *we* had an interest in, Chet?"

"Humph! that *would* be tough. But he isn't."

"Just the same, promise me something," urged Laura, clinging to his shoulder with both hands.

"What is it, Sis?" asked Chet, in surprise.

"*Don't* tell the sheriff if you should run across the poor young man. Don't tell anybody!"

"Why, Sis!"

"I have a reason. I can't tell you what it is," Laura said, half sobbing. "Will you mind me, Chet?"

"Surest thing you know!" declared her brother, heartily.

"And without asking questions?"

"That's putting a bit of a strain on me," laughed Chet. "But I know you must have a good reason, Sis. Only remember, when you want help, you haven't any friend like your own 'buddy.'"

"I know it, dear," said Laura, kissing him. "You are the best brother who ever lived!"

This was all "on the side." When they rejoined the others, neither Chet nor Laura revealed any particular emotion. The girls all promised to be ready for the fishing trip an hour after daybreak on the following morning.

Meanwhile, everything at Acorn Island went on as usual. Liz Bean seemed no more morose than before. Mrs. Morse was much too busy to notice small things. She had half-heartedly of-

fered to accompany the girls and boys to Bang-up Creek for the fishing; but they had all assured her that it would be unnecessary.

Instead, they were to come home by mid-afternoon and all have supper at the island. The boys brought over a part of their own provisions, when they arrived in the bigger motorboat soon after sun-up.

Purt Sweet was the only boy who did not have a smile on; he looked gloomy indeed.

"What's the matter?" asked Jess.

"Surely he isn't afraid of the Barnacle, is he?" queried Dora.

"Don't bother about *him*," said Dorothy. "He's tied up, anyway, so as not to follow us."

"How do you think that dog can follow us, when we're going ten miles by boat?" demanded Reddy Butts.

"I don't know but the Barnacle would sprout wings and fly through the air after Purt," giggled Bobby.

"It isn't the dog this time that troubles Purt—deah boy!" drawled Lance Darby.

"What is it?" asked Laura.

"Purt's day is spoiled," declared Lance. "He has come off without his cigarettes."

"Cigarettes!" exclaimed Jess. "I thought we had shown him the folly of smoking coffin nails long ago."

"Oh, he doesn't smoke any," Lance returned. "But he always carries a case of them around with him. You know, he bought a thousand once with his monogram printed in gold on them, and he never *will* get rid of them all. He thought it would be a good thing to bring them to camp with him so as to use them for a smudge to chase off the mosquitoes."

"And they work all right," grunted Chet. "The smoke chases the mosquitoes, you can believe. But then, the smoke chases *us*, too. Purt's brand of cigarettes is made out of long-filler Connecticut cabbage."

"That's all right; don't make fun of the poor fellow," Lance said, with exaggerated sympathy. "Even if anybody had cigarettes to lend him, he couldn't smoke any with anothah fellah's monogram on 'em, don'tcher know, old top?"

But it came out that there was something else on Purt Sweet's mind. He had a very expensive rod, reel, and book of flies. And to tell the truth, he had never strung a line on such a rod, and did not know any more about using the flies than a baby in arms!

He hated to admit his ignorance, for the boys were not at all tender with the Central High dude. However, Chet and Lance were not ill-natured, and Purt plucked up courage finally to beg Lance

to take him privately up stream (when they reached the creek) and give him a lesson in fly-casting.

Lance had already taken Laura under his wing —as was to be expected; but Mother Wit made him give Purt the assistance he needed. The three wandered up stream, far above the series of quiet pools where the other members of the party were casting for trout, or fishing for perch.

The trio passed a series of rapids, several rods long, and then struck a very beautiful stretch of calm water, with tree-shaded banks, and shallows where the cat-tails and rushes grew in thick clusters.

"I see a sign up yonder," Laura said to Lance. "Didn't you say a part of this stream was a private fishing preserve?"

"So I've been told. We won't go beyond the sign," said Lance.

He got Laura and Purt properly stationed and then cast, himself. They were having good sport and had landed several beauties, when Billy Long came idly up the stream on the other side.

"Hello!" he grunted. "Everywhere I go, there are girls. Isn't there a place where a fellow can get away from them and fish? They chatter so much that they drive all the fish into the mud, with their fins over their ears—that's right!"

"Horrid thing!" said Laura. "We can keep just as silent when we're fishing as any of you boys."

"Try it, then," advised Short and Long, gruffly.

He kept on up stream. "Look out there, Billy," Lance advised. "It's posted above there."

"Posted?"

"Yes. Don't you see that sign?"

"Huh!" said the smaller boy. "I never *did* believe in signs. And besides, it says there's no fishing here—and I believe it! I haven't had a bite all the way up this brook."

He went on a bit farther and cast his fly again. Quiet fell upon the long pool, where the shadow and sunshine lay in alternate blocks.

Suddenly there was a scrambling through the brush on the side of the stream where Short and Long was standing, and then appeared a big dog and a big man, the latter holding the former in leash. The man was just as ugly looking as the dog—and the Barnacle was a howling beauty beside this dog!

"Hey, you!" exclaimed the man to Short and Long—and he certainly *did* speak savagely.

CHAPTER XIX

THE YOUNG MAN WITH THE GUN

"Oh, dear, Lance!" gasped Laura Belding, in a whisper. "I am afraid Short and Long will get into trouble. That man looks perfectly savage!"

But the small boy did not seem to be in the least disturbed. He had just made a very pretty cast into the stream as the dog and its master appeared.

"Say! can't you read that there sign?" demanded the man, very red in the face. The sign really was plainly to be seen, and easily read. In large black letters it said:

PRIVATE
NO FISHING ALLOWED

The angler looked at the sign on the tree unabashed and observed:

"I didn't notice it. You see, Mister, they taught me never to read anything marked 'Private.'"

"Well, it says 'No fishin' allowed,' anyway," snarled the farmer.

"But I'm not fishing aloud," came from Short and Long, who was perfectly serious. "That's what I've been kickin' about. The other folks down stream are making so much noise that they'd give every trout in the brook nervous prostration. I tell you I came up here especially to be quiet about my fishing——"

"You may think you're funny, youngster," interrupted the man; "but you're fishin' just the same, aren't you?"

"Not so's you'd notice it," declared Short and Long. "All I've managed to do so far is to give my fly a chance to swim. Haven't even had a rise."

"I'll give yer a rise, confound ye!" roared the man, coming with a rush through the bushes. "Git out o' there, an' git out quick, or I'll set this dawg on ye!"

Here Lance took a hand in the affair. He shouted across the stream:

"Have a care, there, Mister! If that dog is savage, don't you turn him loose."

"Who the dickens are *you?*" snarled the farmer. "This is my land, and it's posted, and this here is my dawg——"

"Let me have that pistol of yours, Purt," commanded Lance, firmly, reeling in his line.

The dude, who had stood open-mouthed and

shaking, could not follow Lance's lead worth a cent. "You—you know, Lance," he stammered, "the pistol won't shoot——"

"Ho, ho!" cried the farmer, who had stopped abruptly when Lance had spoken. "Tryin' to scare me, was you? Now you step lively, or I'll let the dawg go."

"You poor sport!" gasped Lance, scowling at the shaking dude.

Short and Long, having tempted the fates far enough, was winding up his own line. And just before the fly left the surface of the water a trout jumped for it and caught the hook.

"Whee!" yelled Short and Long, as the line reeled out, singing shrilly.

"Stop that!" yelled the man. "That's my fish——"

"I can't help it," responded the boy from Central High. "I was reeling in, wasn't I? He came right up and jumped for my fly. Call off your old fish, if you don't want him caught on my hook and line."

But Billy Long was too saucy that time. He was playing the fish while he talked, just as well as he knew how. The farmer gave a yell, let the dog's strap run through his hand, and the beast, with an angry bay, dashed straight at the youthful fisherman.

Perhaps the farmer did not really intend doing such a cruel thing. For the dog would have torn Billy Long to pieces had he reached him.

There was a shout from across the stream—on the side where Laura stood—and a man leaped into the open. He carried a gun. As he reached the bank of the brook he threw up the shot-gun and empted the contents of one barrel into the fore-shoulder of the angry dog.

The distance was scarcely two rods. The small shot peppered the dog well, and gave him a whole lot to think of beside grabbing a defenseless boy.

The farmer began to yell vociferously; the dog raised his voice even more loudly and, after falling and rolling over and over on the ground for a moment, he got to his feet and cut into the bushes like a flash. He was more scared than hurt.

"I'll have you arrested for that!" yelled the dog's owner, shaking both clenched fists at the young man with the gun.

"You'd better thank me that the beast did not grab that boy," was the reply.

The young man with the gun seemed perfectly calm. He was a pale-faced young man, well dressed in a hunting suit, and with narrow boots on his rather small feet. He was doubtless a city sportsman.

"I bet I know who you be, ye scoundrel!" bawled the farmer.

The young man turned away instantly. Laura saw that he flushed and then paled again. He did not stop to say a word to the party of young folk from Centerport. Instead, he stepped into the thick underbrush and was almost instantly lost to their sight.

Short and Long had hastened to get over the border of the farmer's posted preserve. But he had brought the trout with him—and it weighed a good pound and a half!

CHAPTER XX

LAURA KEEPS HER SECRET

They left the farmer threatening vengeance upon the strange young man who had used his shot-gun to such good purpose.

"That fellow's all right, whoever he is," Lance declared. "And how quick he was with his gun!"

"He knows how to use one," Short and Long agreed, with admiration. "I wish I could have thanked him."

"And this dummy here!" added Lance, with a look of disgust at Purt. "You had that old pistol in your pocket, didn't you?" he demanded of the dude.

"Ye–es," agreed Purt.

"Then if you had kept still about it, I could have scared that farmer into holding his dog in leash. Just as glad the brute was shot, though. He'll be tamed for a while, I bet!"

"It is too bad the dog was trained so badly," Laura said. "It is not his fault that he was taught to attack people."

"Well!" grunted Short and Long. "If he'd grabbed me, I reckon he'd have eaten me up before anybody could have helped."

"You had no business on that man's land," said Laura, admonishingly. "And you *did* sauce him."

"Ugh! who'd have thought he was so mean?" growled Short and Long.

"Bet you have a care next time," said Lance, grinning. "But who do you suppose that fellow with the gun was? I'd really like to meet him again."

"Good sort, whoever he is," Short and Long agreed.

"No farmer."

"Not much! He was city-dressed all right."

Laura listened to their comments, but said nothing. She believed she could make a good guess as to who the young man was; but she was keeping that secret to herself.

When she and the three boys rejoined their companions down stream, they had enough to tell about the adventure without declaring the identity of the young man with the gun. It was exciting enough to have had Short and Long almost "chawed up" by a savage dog, as Lance expressed it.

"And this useless piece of goods," he added,

taking Purt by the collar, "made a foozle—right off the reel! I could have scared that big bully easily enough if Purt had kept still about his old revolver being no good."

"I don't care," complained Purt. "The revolver would have been all right if you hadn't taken that screw out and thrown it away."

"And you'd likely shot yourself—or somebody else—by this time."

"No I wouldn't," said Purt, gloomily.

"How do you know?" asked Chet.

"Why—I find that when I bought cartridges for that pistol I got thirty-eights—and the pistol is a forty-five!"

The whole crowd laughed at that. Purt Sweet really *was* too funny for anything.

They got another good laugh on him before they went back to the island. There was a squatter's cabin near the bank of the brook and they trooped up there for a drink of cool milk, for the woman had two cows and was willing to sell the milk to them, right from her log buttery.

The woman's daughter—a girl about Lil Pendleton's age—waited on them. She was a brown-skinned, big-eyed, healthy-looking girl—a regular country beauty. Laura whispered:

"Isn't she a splendid creature?"

Purt had cocked an appreciative eye at her, and he murmured:

"Quite true—quite true, Miss Laura. She's as beautiful as Hebe," and gave the name of the goddess the very best pronunciation, according to Professor Dimp.

"Beautiful as *he* be?" drawled Chet, in exaggeration of bucolic twang, looking amusedly at the lank and lazy squatter himself who lay snoring on the platform before the hut. "Huh! she's a sight purtier than *he* be. Why, *he's* as humbly as a hedge-fence—an' ye can see, Purt, that the girl takes after her mother."

"It sure is too bad how they rig you, Pretty," laughed Jess.

"Pretty's all right!" joined in Billy Long. "Only one thing wrong with him. He starts easy, and he speeds up well, but just at the critical moment he always skids."

"Hear the motor talk from Short and Long! Yow!" exclaimed Reddy Butts. "And old Purt's not so slow at that!"

"Who said he was slow?" demanded Short and Long, with apparent indignation. "Bet you can't do him, Reddy."

"Bet I can—and for half a dollar, too," declared the youth with the radiant head of hair.

This was after the party had returned to the creek and luncheon was in order. The other boys saw that the red-headed youth and Short and

Long had a scheme between them, and they sat back and prepared to enjoy Purt's discomfiture.

"You can't fool Purt in a hundred years," Short and Long reiterated, quite hotly.

"Can," returned Reddy, briefly, with his mouth full. "Got a half dollar, Purt?"

"What if I have?" demanded the dude, suspiciously.

"You put it under that mug on the table, and I bet I can take the money without touching the mug."

"You cawn't trick me," drawled Purt. "You couldn't do that, you know, Reddy."

"Put your half dollar under the mug and see if I can't," chuckled the auburn-haired youth.

Thus urged, Purt did as agreed. He placed a half dollar on the table, and carefully covered it with an inverted mug that he had been drinking milk from.

Everybody was interested now and was watching the proceedings.

"Better put a napkin over it, Purt," advised Reddy. "For I'm going to fool you a whole lot!"

"You cawn't fool me, deah boy!" declared the dude, with growing conviction.

But he carefully covered the mug. Then Reddy, with a grin, reached under the rough table

they were using and soon pulled his hand back with a half dollar in the palm.

The boys laughed, and wondered, and the girls were likewise puzzled. Purt looked both amazed and vexed. Then they began to laugh at him.

"Mighty easy way to make half a dollar," commented Reddy, slipping it into his pocket. "I told you I'd get it, Purt, without touching the mug."

"But you didn't do it, doncher know!" cried Purt, growing exasperated. "My half dollar is there."

He whipped off the napkin, lifted the mug—and Reddy, with a laugh, grabbed the coin that lay under it.

"I told you I'd get it without lifting the mug, Purt," he said, and the crowd burst into a chorus of laughter. Purt had been made the victim of the joke, after all.

It was all good fun, however. Purt could well afford the half dollar, and after a minute he, too, laughed.

They started back for Acorn Island in good season, with a nice string of speckled trout and some two dozen white perch—the promise of a splendid "fish-fry" that evening. On the way they passed the heavy canoe seen several times before on the lake.

There was but one man in it now, fishing; and he sat with his shoulders hunched up and his hat drawn down about his face.

"I wonder who that old man is?" Chet said, reflectively, as the *Bonnie Lass* sped by.

"Wonder where his camp is?" responded Lance, idly.

"He looks like a native," Reddy said. "If he's no handsomer than that squatter back yonder, I wouldn't want to see him any closer to."

Laura, and Jess, and Bobby looked at each other surreptitiously. They knew that the man in the canoe was Professor Asa Dimp, Latin teacher at Central High!

CHAPTER XXI

THE SHERIFF WITH HIS DOGS

ANOTHER evening melted into night, leaving in the minds of most of the girls of Central High now encamped on Acorn Island, a feeling of contentment and pleasure because of a well-spent day.

Their activities had been joyous ones; their fun and sport healthful; and nothing had really occurred to trouble their minds.

Of course, Laura was an exception to the others. Jess and Bobby were to a degree disturbed over the mystery of the young man who had visited the camp on two occasions, and about their unexpected discovery of Professor Dimp's presence on Acorn Island.

But it was Mother Wit who had thought out the true significance of these mysterious happenings. She had reason to believe that the "Mr. Norman" whom Lizzie Bean had talked about—and the man who had frightened the same Lizzie and robbed the camp of food—and the Norman Halliday who was wanted by the sheriff for the

robbery of the Merchants and Miners Bank of Albany, was one and the same person.

Not alone that, but he was camping on this island, without a permit from the Rocky River Lumber Company; and his companion was their own respected, if not well-liked, Professor Dimp.

Certainly the old professor could have had nothing to do with the robbery of the bank; nor could he have reaped any benefit by such crime. Laura was sure that the old professor was perfectly honest and respectable.

He was surely not camping against his will, with the strange young man who had saved Short and Long from the farmer's savage dog. Professor Dimp must have some deep interest in him.

Laura, too, could not believe the young man with the gun to be a criminal of the character the newspapers had given the thief and forger who had betrayed his employers in the bank.

"That young man has a good face. If Lizzie's story is true, too, he has a good heart. And he was quick to act to-day when he saved Billy Long; he took a chance for a stranger, when it was unwise for him to show himself.

"There is a mystery about him. The professor would not be with the young man if he were bad—oh! I am sure of that," concluded Laura.

This discussion Laura carried on in her mind.

She did not take even Jess into her inmost confidence, and Chet—of course—went back to the mainland with the rest of the boys, when bedtime came.

Poor old Professor Dimp! He had ever been the butt for his careless pupils' pranks. His eccentricities, his absent-mindedness, and his devotion to what Bobby called "the dead parts of speech" had made him an object of the pupils' dislike and a subject for their wit.

Of course, they knew he was wonderfully well educated—that the depths of Latin and Greek were easily plumbed by his thought. But respect for a teacher's attainments does not always breed love for the teacher—nor an appreciation of the said teacher's softer qualities, either.

Laura had come to the conclusion that there must be a side to "Old Dimple's" character that few of his pupils had surmised.

There was a bond between Professor Dimp and that mysterious young man from Albany that Laura Belding did not understand. Yet she sought her cot that night with a belief that the old gentleman was good and kind, and that the accusation against his young companion must be very, very wrong!

Could she have climbed a tree like Short and Long, Laura would have gone to the top of one

of the big oaks near the camp, the next morning at daybreak. From that height she knew she could see most of the open patches on the island, clear to the western end.

She was very curious as to whether Professor Dimp was still camping in the little glade where she and her comrades had met him. And had the young man returned from the north side of the lake where she had seen him the day before?

Laura was an early riser, as ever, that morning. She was tempted, before the camp was generally astir, to run out to the end of the island and see if the Professor's camp were still established there.

But Professor Dimp had been so sharp with her and the other girls, that Laura half feared to meet him. He was certainly a stern old gentleman, and she remembered now that, from the time the girls of Central High had decided to come here to Acorn Island to camp, Professor Dimp had been quite put out about it.

"Why!" thought Laura, "he was planning to come here himself at that time. He must have already arranged to meet the young man here. And he considers us interlopers. It's very, very strange!"

Nor did Laura wish to discuss the affair with Jess or Bobby Hargrew. She was afraid to tell

anybody what she surmised about Professor Dimp's companion.

It was after breakfast—which Liz served with all the spirit and cheerfulness, so Bobby said, of an Egyptian mummy with the mumps!—that they first spied the big barge coming from the north shore of the lake.

The slow-moving craft was under sail and there were several men aboard of her, as well as a pack of dogs which now and then gave tongue. Immediately the Barnacle went raving mad. The sigh and sound of so many canines heading toward the island that had been his own domain for a week, quite drove the Barnacle out of such few senses as he possessed.

He barked at the barge from the heights where the camp stood; then he raced down to the shore and emitted a salvo of barks from the landing on that side of the island. Then he raced back again, and so returned to the shore—alternating in his rushes in the craziest possible way.

Meanwhile the barge drew nearer and nearer. The general question at the girls' camp was: "Why were the men and dogs coming to Acorn Island?"

"They can't land here without a permit," Bobby declared. "The Rocky River Lumber Company has posted the island."

"And what sort of game can they hunt with hounds this time of year?" demanded Jess.

"Those are bloodhounds," said her mother, calmly. "English bloodhounds."

"Goodness!" squealed Bobby, suddenly. "Bloodhounds? Don't you all feel just like Eliza crossing the ice, girls?"

"Not much!" cried Dora, laughing. "On a hot day like this?"

The cicadas were filing their saws in the tops of the trees and the promise of one of the hottest days of the season danced in the shimmer of haze over the water.

"Do you really suppose they are coming here with those dogs?" repeated Nell.

"They have no business to land," said Bobby, again serious.

"I know who they are!" Jess cried, suddenly.

"Who?" asked her mother.

"Chet said something about a sheriff coming to the boys' camp over yonder. And he had a pack of bloodhounds with him."

"But why should an officer of the law come *here?*" queried Mrs. Morse.

Laura, and Jess, and Bobby looked at each other. Of course, Mother Wit had understood the approach of the barge from the first; but she had said nothing. Now Jess and Bobby burst out with:

"Oh! he must be after that young man."

"What young man?" was the chorus of the other campers.

"The young man who is with Professor Dimp," said the thoughtless Bobby. "Isn't that it, Laura?"

Laura groaned. The cat was out of the bag now, and she foresaw much trouble in the camp on Acorn Island.

CHAPTER XXII

WHERE PROFESSOR DIMP COMES IN BIG

"WHAT under the sun are you talking about, Bobby?" demanded Lil Pendleton; and Nell cried:

"Professor Dimp! What do you know about the professor?"

"Is *he* here?" demanded Dora.

"Not Old Dimple?" chimed in her twin.

"You surprise me, Clara," said Mrs. Morse. "Are you referring to your Latin teacher? and is he anywhere near here?"

"Oh, gracious! I'm always putting my foot into it whenever I open my mouth," groaned Bobby.

"A highly impossible athletic feat, I am sure, Bobby," said Jess, unable to keep from laughing, although she knew Bobby deserved chiding.

"I want to know what this means," exclaimed Lil again. "Who is this sheriff after? And why is Old Dimple mixed up in it?"

"It's the fellow who came and robbed our

larder!" shrieked Nell, guessing the enigma at last.

"I am afraid that is who the sheriff is looking for," admitted Laura, gravely.

"And why *here?*" cried Lil. "Didn't that fellow take the food and get away from the island?"

"We did not find him—that's sure!" said Dora Lockwood.

"Barnacle found his camp, and we saw Professor Dimp there," explained Laura seeing that a clean breast of it was the better way.

"Who's 'we?'" demanded Lil.

"Jess and Bobby and I. We spoke to the old professor, and he was real cross to us. He would not tell us anything about the young man."

"Then Liz *did* see that Mr. Norman the night we were robbed?" said Nell.

"Yes. I expect so."

"'Mr. Norman?'" Nell repeated, reflectively. "And the fellow who robbed that bank in Albany is Norman Halliday? The very same!"

"And you knew this all along, Laura Belding?" cried Lil. "You mean thing!"

"Oh, quit, Lil," advised Bobby, gruffly. "Why should Laura stir up a row and scare you all? I never till this very moment guessed who

the fellow might be, myself. Of course the sheriff is looking for him!"

"And on this island!" murmured Lil. "A criminal!"

"We don't know how much of a criminal he is," said Laura, stoutly. "He was the fellow that saved Short and Long from that dog yesterday, I verily believe," and she wagged her head. "*He* didn't look very desperate, I can tell you!"

"My goodness! that's so," said Bobby, eagerly. "Let's keep the sheriff off."

"How are you going to do it?" asked Jess. "Go down there and stone him when the barge comes near?" and she chuckled.

"He hasn't any permit. This is private land——"

"But can't he search the island for a law-breaker?" asked Dorothy.

"I don't know that he has a right to, without a warrant."

"But if we try to stop him," said Laura, slowly, "won't he suspect that we don't want him to search the island?"

"Say!" exclaimed Lil, angrily. "What do *we* care?"

"We don't want him to find that poor fellow," said Bobby.

"Why not?" repeated Lil, sharply.

"After he saved Short and Long's life?"

"Humph! should we pass a vote of thanks to him for *that?*" demanded Lil, with sarcasm.

"Not for that, perhaps," Laura said, gently. "But think of the old professor."

"Old Dimple!"

"The old Prof?"

"What about him?"

The chorus rose loud and general. Laura flushed, but held her ground.

"Our loyalty to Central High ought to be enough to prompt us to help one of our teachers. In some way the old professor is connected with this young man who is in danger of arrest. I don't mean that we should actually thwart the officer of the law. But I, for one, certainly will not help the officer."

"You are right, Mother Wit!" cried Bobby. "I'll go a step farther. I'll try to keep that man from landing here with his dogs."

"I know nothing about the right or wrong of the case," said Mrs. Morse; "but I am afraid of those awful beasts. There are five of them!"

"And Barnacle will only get into a fight with them if they land," declared Jess, rather amused. "Let's go down to the lake in a body and refuse to allow the dogs to come ashore."

Liz Bean had listened from the cook-tent, but

said nothing. Her plain face was as expressionless as ever.

Now, when Mrs. Morse and the girls of Central High started down the slope on the northern side of the knoll, Liz slipped into the woods to the west, and quickly disappeared in the thick underbrush.

The big mainsail of the barge had been dropped and the men with the sheriff were paddling the craft in to the shore. Now and then a hound would lift its head and utter a mournful bay. Then Barnacle would strive to bark his own head off!

Laura recognized one of the paddlers with a start of surprise. It was the vicious farmer who had set his dog on Short and Long, on Bang-up Creek!

If she had had any doubts about the right and wrong of an attempt to thwart the sheriff before, Laura had none *now*. Perhaps her course was indefensible; but intuitively she believed that farmer to be a bad man. And she was sure that he was the one who had set the sheriff on this trail.

He had doubtless followed the young man with the gun and seen him join Professor Dimp. The two had paddled for Acorn Island. The farmer had communicated with the sheriff.

Right then, so hotly burned Laura's righteous indignation, that she would have done her very best to keep the officer of the law from landing those bloodhounds, and chasing the mysterious "Mr. Norman" out of his hiding place.

But it was Bobby who put the ball into play first.

"Say, Mister! don't you bring those dogs ashore here!" she called to the sheriff.

He was a big, red-faced, beefy-looking man, with a bristling mustache and little, piglike eyes.

"I wanter know!" he said, huskily. "Who do you think you are giving orders to, young lady?"

"You are a sheriff, aren't you?"

"Yes I be," said the man.

"And you are searching all the woods around about for a convict?"

"Not perzactly. But he's likely ter be a convic' arter I git him," and he chuckled, hoarsely.

"Well, this island is posted. We have a permit to camp here, but I don't believe *you* have any warrant for landing at all," said Bobby, sharply. "And my father, who is one of the directors of the Rocky River Lumber Company, certainly does not want a pack of hounds like those, running the game on this island—out of season, too."

"This ain't that kind o' game, young lady,"

said the sheriff, slowly. Then he stopped. A figure had suddenly appeared from the wood. It was a shabby but commanding figure, and the girls themselves shrank together and waited for the old Latin professor to speak.

"Miss Hargrew is quite right," said Professor Dimp, in his iciest tone. "Those hounds must not land here."

"I say, now!" growled the sheriff.

"This is private property," continued Professor Dimp, coldly, "as Miss Hargrew tells you. You can see the signs. You will trespass here if you are determined. But I warn you that if you bring those dogs ashore you will be prosecuted."

"I'm a-goin' to search this islan'," growled Sheriff Larkin, uglily.

"You may. You have no warrant to do so, but you may. But you must not bring ashore those dogs. And," added the professor, turning and bowing with old-fashioned courtesy to Mrs. Morse, "you must keep away from the camp where this lady and her young charges are ensconced."

He turned on his heel in conclusion, and walked into the woods again.

"Three rousing cheers!" whispered Bobby under her breath. "What's the matter with Old Dimple? *He's* all right!"

CHAPTER XXIII

LIZ ON THE DEFENSIVE

The professor had spoken with such authority that Sheriff Larkin hesitated in his intention of landing the bloodhounds. Besides, having learned that one of these girls was a daughter of a member of the powerful lumber company, he feared to make a misstep.

The Rocky River Lumber Company could make or break a sheriff easily enough. The political power of the men owning the corporation in Monadnock County was supreme.

"Well, I tell ye what it is, ladies," he said, pulling off his broad brimmed hat to wipe a perspiring, red brow. "I gotter do my duty——"

"With the prospect of five hundred dollars ahead of you!" interposed Bobby, pertly.

"That ain't neither here nor there," declared the man. "I got to search the island."

"You know best what you must do, sir," said Mrs. Morse, coldly. "But I beg of you to leave your dogs on the boat. I am afraid of the brutes."

"And don't come to *our* camp, I pray, looking for any criminal," said Laura, speaking for the first time.

"Why! I guess not, Ma'am!" cried the sheriff. "Come on, boys. Leave them dawgs tied yere. And we'll go over the island. It's purty open timber this end, so he ain't likely to be near here."

They had moored the barge. Barnacle had barked himself hoarse. When the sheriff and four of his companions leaped ashore, he put his tail between his legs and scuttled up the hillside again.

At the top he suddenly began to bark once more. He did not face down hill, but seemed distraught about something, or somebody, in the camp.

"Hey!" exclaimed the ugly farmer whom Laura had taken a dislike to the previous day. "That dawg sees something."

"He is crazy," spoke up Laura, quickly. "He is like enough barking at our maid."

"Sure!" rejoined Bobby. "Liz is up there."

"Come on!" exclaimed the sheriff to his men, and started westward, in the direction Professor Dimp had taken.

"Whom do you suppose the Barnacle is really barking at?" whispered Jess to Laura Belding. "He'd never make all that 'catouse' over Liz. In fact, he wouldn't bark at her at all."

"Hush!" warned Laura, as the party started up the slope toward the camp.

Jess looked at her curiously. Barnacle was still barking with desperate determination. Liz appeared before the Central High girls climbed to the top of the hillock, and catching the dog by the collar, dragged him over to the corner of the log cabin and snapped on his chain.

"There!" Laura heard her say. "Ye kin bark your head off—but ye can't run."

The girl went back to her cook-tent and began clearing up the breakfast things again. Laura noted that she seemed to have done nothing while they were down on the shore.

But that was not surprising; perhaps she had crept near to overhear the talk with the sheriff. Now Liz said nothing to any of them, and went grimly on with her work.

"It's my turn to help you get dinner, Lizzie," Laura said, quietly. "What are we going to have? Shall I begin by peeling the potatoes?"

"No. Don't want yer," said Liz, shortly.

"Why! of course you want some help——"

"Don't neither!" snapped the maid-of-all-work.

"Why, Lizzie!" said Laura, in surprise—at least, in apparent surprise! "You surely don't want to do all the work yourself?"

"I'd ruther," responded the girl, ungraciously. "You gals are in my way in the tent."

Now this, of course, was ridiculous. It could mean but one thing: Liz was anxious to be alone in the cook-tent. And *why?*

Laura, however, merely said:

"Oh! very well. If you prefer not to be helped, Lizzie, that is all right."

And she walked away; but she did not lose sight of the cook-tent. There was somebody there beside the maid-of-all-work, and Laura was sure she knew *who*.

Lil was inclined to feel abused. She thought that she should have been taken into the secret at the first.

"But see how you would have kicked," said the slangy Bobby. "Why! you'd have wanted to go back home by the first boat."

"I don't think we ought to have stayed here with that man on the island," grumbled Lil.

"With the old professor tagging after him?" chuckled Jess. "My goodness! can there be anything more respectable than Old Dimple?"

"If he is, why is he mixed up with this bank thief?" asked Lil, bluntly.

"I don't believe the young man is any such thing," announced Laura, hearing this. "He

doesn't look bad. And surely we can trust to the professor's judgment."

"And we ought to help Professor Dimp," said Nell. "Poor old man! I am sorry for him."

"Say! Old Dimple's a good sort," declared Bobby, enthusiastically. "And he certainly stood up to that red-faced sheriff this morning—Oh, gee!" finished the tomboy, with a gasp. "Here he is now."

"Here's who?" squealed Lil, whirling around.

"Professor Dimp?" demanded Nell.

But it was the sheriff.

"'Scuse me, young ladies," he wheezed. "But I feel it my duty to s'arch this yere camp. If you ain't a-hidin' of that thar feller, ye won't mind my pokin' around a bit, will yer?"

Laura did not say a word. She stood up and looked over at Liz Bean. For a moment the maid-of-all-work seemed petrified.

Then she dove for the growling Barnacle. She untied the rope with which he was fastened.

"Hello!" exclaimed the puffing sheriff. "What's *that* for?"

Liz held the Barnacle with difficulty; the dog bared his teeth at the sheriff and uttered a series of most blood-curdling growls.

"You come botherin' around *here*," said Liz, desperately, "an' I'll let him fly at ye!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BARNACLE TREES SOMETHING AT LAST

Both the girls of Central High, and their brothers and boy friends, in the camp across the lake, had believed the Barnacle to be "all bluff." He was a fine dog for barking, as Short and Long had said, but he acted as though he thought his teeth had been given him for chewing his food, and for nothing else.

The savage way in which he bayed the sheriff, however, and tried to get at him as Liz held him in leash, was really surprising. It was no wonder that Sheriff Larkin started back and cried out in alarm.

"Don't you dare set that dawg on me, young woman!" he cried. "I'll have the law on yer, if yer do."

"He'll chaw yer up if I let him go," threatened Liz. "Git out o' here!"

"Why, Lizzie!" gasped Mrs. Morse, coming to the door of the cabin, and speaking to the girl in a most amazed tone. "What does this mean?"

"He's a body snatcher! he's a man hunter! he's ev'rything mean an' filthy!" exclaimed the girl, her face red and her eyes blazing. Her appearance was really most astonishing. Laura would never have believed that "Lonesome Liz" could display so much emotion.

"Let him bother this camp if he dares!" went on Liz. "He was told by that old gentleman to keep away from here, wasn't he? Then let him run, for I ain't a-goin' to hold this dawg in much longer!"

It seemed that her threat would hold true. At every leap Barnacle made, he seemed about to tear the rope from her grasp.

"Missis!" yelled the sheriff to Mrs. Morse. "You'd better call that gal off——"

"She ain't got nothin' to do with it," declared Liz. "I ain't workin' for her no more. I ain't workin' for nobody. I've struck, I have! You can't hold nobody responserble but me an' Barnacle."

"The gal's crazy!" squalled the sheriff, going rapidly backward, for the dog and Liz were advancing.

"Well, you won't shet me up in no 'sylum," declared Liz, grimly. "But ye *may* send me ter the penitentiary."

"Did you ever hear the like?" gasped Lil,

clinging to Nellie and Jess. "That girl's mad."

"She is brave," muttered Jess. "But—but I wonder what she's up to?"

Laura did not question the maid-of-all-work. She thought she already knew. There was method in Lizzie's madness, that was sure!

She was driving the bullying sheriff away from the cook-tent—away from the camp, indeed. He was going sideways like a crab, and Barnacle was growling and almost choking himself as he tugged at his collar.

"Git out! Scat!" exclaimed Liz. "I'm a-goin' to let this dawg *go!*"

"Don'cher dare!" shouted Sheriff Larkin.

But the girl deliberately stooped over Barnacle, and began to unfasten the rope. At that the officer of the law turned and lumbered down the hill.

Where his companions were the girls did not know. And the barge with the bloodhounds had been poled off shore a few rods. The keeper was sitting on it and calmly smoking his pipe.

Sheriff Larkin was some rods from the shore. With a sudden roar Barnacle slipped his leash and tore down the slope. The dog had run a lot of game on Acorn Island since being landed here; but never a quarry like this.

The big man gave one glance behind and then lost all hope of reaching the boat. There was a

low-branching tree before him. He leaped for the nearest branch and swung his booted legs for a moment while he tried to hitch up on the limb.

The Barnacle jumped for him. The dog fastened to his heel, and for the first time the girls saw that the mongrel-cur really had a terrific grip.

Sheriff Larkin scrambled up into the tree; but for half a minute Barnacle swung from him, clear of the ground. When he dropped to the ground the heel of the sheriff's boot came with the dog's jaws!

Barnacle crouched down and began to masticate the heel. But the glare that he turned upward at the man, from his red-rimmed eyes, proclaimed the fact that he would "just as lives" chew on the sheriff's anatomy.

The camp on the top of the knoll had been left in confusion. The girls were talking rather wildly—some praising Liz and others deploring the happening.

Mrs. Morse commanded silence. She walked over to where the maid-of-all-work stood before the cook-tent.

"What does this mean, Lizzie Bean?" she demanded.

"I tell you I ain't workin' for you no more," cried Liz, wildly. "I've give up me job."

"But you had no right to do what you have done."

"I don't care. I'd done more. I'd gone at that sheriff with my finger-nails if he'd come nearer. Don't I hate him—*just?*"

"Why—why, Lizzie!" gasped the gentle Mrs. Morse.

Here Laura interfered. "I believe I know what is the matter with Lizzie, Mrs. Morse," she said.

"Well!" snapped Lil, in the background. "Let's hear it. The girl's crazy. My mother would never have paid for such a creature to come here with us if she'd known."

"Your ma needn't give me a cent, Miss," returned Liz, sullenly.

"What *is* the matter with her, Laura?" asked Mrs. Morse again.

"She has somebody hidden in that tent," said Mother Wit, calmly. "Isn't that the truth, Lizzie? Isn't Mr. Halliday in there—Mr. Norman Halliday?"

"The bank robber!" shrieked Lil.

"Oh, oh!" gasped Nellie.

"Hurray for Liz!" exclaimed Bobby, but in a low tone.

"It cannot be?" queried Mrs. Morse.

"Yes he is. I got him here while youse folks

was down talkin' to that red-faced sheriff. He was good to me when I lived at that boardin' house, in Albany, he was! I wouldn't give him up to that sheriff."

Mrs. Morse looked at Laura very gravely. "*You* have known about this for some time, Laura? You knew that the young man was on the island?"

"With Professor Dimp—yes," said Mother Wit, bravely.

"Professor Dimp has his own actions to answer for," said Jess' mother, gravely. "But I am quite sure your mother would not approve of your trying to help such a character as this young man seems to be."

"Wait a minute, Mrs. Morse," cried Laura. "Here come Chet and the boys."

"The boys!" chorused the other girls.

"What has your brother to do with this affair?" asked Mrs. Morse, wonderingly.

"I saw Chet wig-wagging a little while ago, and I answered and read his message. He is bringing over a gentleman from Albany—a lawyer—to see Professor Dimp and the young man who has been in hiding so long. I think something important is going to happen," said Laura, complacently. "Do let the Barnacle keep the sheriff up in that tree for a little while longer."

CHAPTER XXV

"QUITE ALL RIGHT"

ONE amazing thing was happening after another. The girls of Central High could scarcely keep up with the several happenings. On top of Laura's statement the platform before the cook-tent heaved mightily, and a man's head and shoulders appeared.

Lil shrieked again. Even Mrs. Morse stepped back in surprise. The young man continued to push his way out, and finally climbed to his feet.

It was the same young man who had appeared on the bank of Bang-up Creek and saved Short and Long from the farmer's dog. His very good looking hunting suit was now sadly torn and wrinkled. He was without a hat. There was a scratch upon his face that had drawn blood, and he was altogether rather messy looking.

He bowed gravely to Mrs. Morse. "I see," he said, "that this young lady," and he looked at Laura, "knows who I am. And further introduction would be unnecessary."

"Ye—yes?" said Mrs. Morse, rather doubtfully.

"I pray that you will not blame Lizzie Bean. She would sacrifice herself for my safety; but I could hardly allow her to do that, don't you know? I had an idea that that sheriff would really not come to this camp, and I could get away again after dark."

Lil had given over any intention of screaming again. She was examining the scratched face of the strange young man with growing approval.

"Isn't he romantic looking?" she whispered to Nellie.

"Poor fellow," sighed the doctor's daughter. "He *doesn't* look wicked, does he?"

"He's a regular heart-breaker when he's dolled up, I bet," giggled Bobby.

"It's too bad!" murmured the Lockwood twins, in unison.

Thus did the appearance of the young man, Mr. Norman Halliday, tell upon the covey of frightened girls. Mrs. Morse herself began to recover from her disturbance of mind. *This* was no criminal character, for sure!

Suddenly the sheriff in the tree set up a bellow: "That's the feller I want! That's him! Don't you let him escape——"

"Why don't you come down and take him?" demanded Bobby, wickedly.

But immediately the Barnacle began leaping under the tree and barking and Sheriff Larkin climbed higher.

"You see, the police want me," explained the young man, simply.

"We—we should judge so," gasped Mrs. Morse.

"But I really don't want to be arrested. Especially by this sheriff. I do not want the bank I work for to be put to the expense of paying him a reward for my apprehension."

This sounded rather odd—from a criminal!

"You see," went on the young man, with a more cheerful smile, "I am going to return to Albany when my attorney lets me know that I may safely do so. Had I remained when I was first charged with the crime of forging names to coupons and bonds, and selling the same for my own benefit, I could not have disproved the accusation.

"It had been arranged to make me a 'scapegoat'—to railroad me to jail, in fact. But I have one good friend, at least—my uncle, Professor Dimp. You all doubtless know him, and know what a really fine old fellow he is," said the young man, heartily.

"He is paying my lawyer's expenses, and he insisted, too, upon coming up here into the

Big Woods and staying with me. That's why I was really obliged to rob your larder one night. I dared not appear at any store to buy food, and I could not let the dear old man go hungry. I hope the money I left was sufficient to pay for the food?"

"Certainly—certainly," murmured Mrs. Morse, while the girls listened in wide-eyed amazement.

"The Professor is just a brick," contained Mr. Norman Halliday, "as of course you all know——"

"You bet we do!" burst out Bobby, her face aflame. "Three cheers for Old D—— That is, for Professor Asa Dimp!"

"Thank you, Miss Hargrew," said the dry voice of the absent-minded old professor. "I did not know I was so well appreciated by the girls of Central High."

But Laura showed *her* appreciation in an entirely unlooked for way. As the professor walked into the open from the woods, she darted for him, seized him tightly in her arms, and planted a kiss first on one, and then on his other unshaven cheek.

"Bless my soul! bless my soul!" gasped Professor Dimp, who had probably not been kissed before in years.

"You're a perfect old *dear!*" declared Laura,

in a low voice. "And I am never going to be afraid of you again. Your nephew showed that he had a tender heart when he was kind to Lizzie Bean; and I believe he gets it honestly—*from you! Dear* Professor Dimp!"

"Ha!" said the old gentleman, drily, yet flushing a little, too, "I can see very clearly that I shall hereafter have very mediocre recitations from the girls of Central High. They will no longer fear me."

At that moment the motorboat that had been skimming across from the main land, pushed her nose against the shore of the island. One of the first persons to land was a gentleman with a green bag in his hand who hurried up the hill to greet the professor and his nephew, the much disheveled Mr. Halliday.

"The best of news Mr. Halliday—and you, my dear Professor Dimp," this gentleman said. "The evidence is concluded. The guilty director has been arrested and the reward for *your* capture, Mr. Halliday, has been withdrawn. I have come to take you back to Albany where your name will be completely cleared of the false accusation."

"Hurrah!" shouted Bobby again, and waving her hand at the dog and the sheriff on the other side of the hill. "Come away, Barnacle; you may let the sheriff down out of the tree."

Dear me! It took nearly all day to explain affairs, after all. The sheriff, and his bloodhounds, and his posse departed unnoticed by the rejoicing party in the camp of the Central High girls.

The girls and boys made a hero out of Professor Dimp. And he was not a bad sort after all—as they found out upon closer acquaintance.

"We shall not let Professor Dimp hide his light under a bushel," cried Laura Belding, otherwise Mother Wit. "Whenever there is anything else exciting going on for the girls of Central High, he shall be in it."

All the males of the party later piled into the *Bonnie Lass* to return to the boys' camp. There the lawyer had left a team with which he was going to take Norman Halliday out of the Big Woods to the railway station.

But the professor promised to remain at least another week, as the guest of the boys. That week was the very jolliest week of all the vacation at Lake Dunkirk, both for the boys, and for the Girls of Central High.

THE END

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